

THE HUMAN TOUCH

"SAPPER"

THE HUMAN TOUCH

BY

“SAPPER”

AUTHOR OF “NO MAN’S LAND,”
“MICHAEL CASSIDY, SERGEANT,”
“MEN, WOMEN AND GUNS,” ETC.

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GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



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NO. 11111
AMERICAN

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER I

THE HUMAN TOUCH

I

IT was about the size of an ordinary tennis lawn at the top, and it was deep enough to contain a workman's cottage. It was a crater—a mine crater. Suddenly one morning the ground near by had shaken as if there was an earthquake; dugouts had rocked, candles and bottles had crashed wildly on to the cursing occupants lying on the floor, and it had appeared. Up above, a great mass of earth and debris had gone towards heaven, and in the fullness of time descended again; a sap head with its wooden frames had disappeared into small pieces; the sentry group of three men occupying it had done likewise. And when the half-stunned occupants of adjacent dugouts and saps, and oddments from the support line had removed various obstacles from their eyes and pulled themselves firmly together in order to go and investigate, they found that the old front line trench had been cut in two and blocked by the explosion. About twenty yards of it had lain within the radius of destruction of the mine, and had passed

gently away; so that instead of a trench to walk along, the explorers found themselves confronted with a great mass of newly thrown up earth which blocked their way. One, more curious than discreet, climbed on top to see what had occurred. He had even got so far as to inform his pals below that it was "Some 'ole," when with an ominous 'phut he slithered a few feet backwards and lay still, with his boots drumming gently against one another.

"Gawd!" A corporal spat viciously. "Wot the 'ell's'e want to go and get up there for? Don't show yerselves, and get a hold on 'is legs. That's right; 'eave 'un in."

In silence the investigators looked at the price of curiosity, and then they covered up his face and took him away. And somewhere in the Hun lines a sniper laughed gently and consumed what was left of his breakfast sausage.

Thus did the crater occur, and with it four vacancies in the roll of the South Devons. Viewed impersonally it seemed a very small result for such a very large hole; but in a performance where the entire bag of a fifteen-inch shell is quite possibly a deserted patch in an inoffensive carrot field, cause and effect have taken unto themselves new standards.

The main result of the crater was the activity produced in the more serious band of investigators who came on the scene a little later. The front line was cut; therefore, the front line must be joined together again. The far lip of the crater was adjacent to our own front line; therefore, the far lip must be held

by a bombing party. And so, through both the walls of earth which blocked the trench, a gallery was pushed by sappers working day and night, while every evening a party of Infantry crept out to the far lip, and sat inside during the night watching for any activity on the part of the Hun.

Which brings us to a certain morning when Shorty Bill sat at the bottom of the crater, and ruminated on life. On each side of him two black holes appeared in the walls of the crater—holes about six feet high and three feet wide—which led by timbered shafts to the two broken ends of the front line trench. In front there rose steeply a wall of earth, along the top of which ran a strand of barbed wire.

It was like sitting at the bottom of a great hole in the dunes, where one's horizon is the broken line of sand and coarse grass above. There was no wind, and the sun warmed him pleasantly as he lay stretched out with his tin hat tilted over his eyes. The fact that there was nothing but fifty odd yards between him and the gentlemen from Berlin disturbed him not at all; the fact that he was thirty odd yards in front of our own front line disturbed him even less. The sun was warm, the sky was cloudless; he had breakfasted well; and—this was the main point—he was in possession of a letter: one might almost say *the* letter. It had come with the mail the previous day, and as Shorty's correspondence was not of the bulk which had ever caused the regimental postman to strike for higher wages, it had occasioned considerable comment. And spice had been added to the

comment by the fact that Shorty had just returned from leave in England.

Shorty, however, was not to be drawn. Completely disregarding all comments, scandalous and otherwise, he had placed the letter in his pocket, to ponder on and digest at a future date, when separated from the common herd. And now, with his eyes half closed, he lay thinking at the bottom of the crater. Beside him, close at hand, was his rifle; and though to a casual observer he might have seemed half asleep, in reality he was very far from it. Almost mechanically his eyes roved along the edge of tumbled earth in front of him; his brain might be busy with things hundreds of miles away, but his subconscious mind was acutely awake: watching, waiting—just in case a Boche head did appear and look down on him from the other side. Shorty didn't make mistakes; in the game across the water it is advisable not to. Moreover, other people did make them, and had you looked at Shorty's rifle you would have seen on the stock a row of little nicks—cut with a knife. Those nicks were the mistakes of the other people. . . .

Short, almost squat, with a great scar across his cheek, due to faulty judgment as to the length of reach in a bear's fore paw, he looked a tough customer. He was a tough customer, and yet those grey eyes of his, with the glint of humour in them, told their own story. Tough perhaps, but human all the while. A man to trust; a man who wouldn't let a woman or a pal down. And as an epitaph few of us will deserve more than that: many will ask for less—in vain. . . .

A noise behind him made him look round, and a man stepped out of one of the wooden galleries.

"Hullo, Shorty," remarked the new-comer. "You're here, are you?" He sat down beside him and stretched himself comfortably. "Nice and warm, it is, too."

For a moment Shorty did not answer, and then he spat reflectively. "What was it you taught them guys at Oxford, son?" he remarked gently.

"Higher mathematics, Shorty. A dull subject, and sometimes now I wonder how the devil I ever stuck it."

"Was it much good to 'em?" Shorty's tone was still soft and mild. "Were you one of the big noises at your school?"

The new-comer shuddered slightly. "We will pass over the word school, Shorty," he gulped; "and as for the other part of your question, I dare say other people would be able to answer you better than I can."

"Wal, I guess it cuts no ice either way. But if you intend to go back, if you're a sort of national insti-tootioon like Madame Tussaud's waxworks or the Elephant and Castle, you'd better be making tracks for your ticket now."

John Mayhew, sometime tutor in the realms of the purest and highest and deadliest mathematics, who would keep his pupils occupied for an hour trying to follow one step on the board, looked at his friend in mild surprise.

"I don't want my ticket now, Shorty."

"Oh, don't you? I was thinking I could come

and certify you as being insane." Shorty sat up and scowled. "After all these months, training you and turning you into a man—wasting me time on you, showing you tricks, an' little ways of making the other man pass out first—you goes and comes into this blinking crater same as if you was blowing into a fancy resturant with your glad rags on. Yer gun hung over your shoulder, yer 'ands in yer pockets—singin' a love song. Oh, it's cruel!" With a hopeless gesture of resignation he dismissed the subject, and lay back once again.

"But, damn it, Shorty, I knew you were here." There are many undergraduates who would willingly have given a month's pay to have seen John Mayhew's face at that moment. Men who had battled on paper for hours, only to confess themselves utterly defeated; men who had heard John's famous remark, "Well, gentlemen, I can supply you with information, but I regret that I cannot supply you with brains," would have given a month's—nay, a year's pay to have seen him then. Utterly crestfallen, he contemplated the irate little man beside him, and confessed miserably to himself that his excuse was poor.

"Knew I was here!" Shorty Bill snorted. "You didn't know nothing of the blinking sort. You never knows where I am. There might have been a crowd of Boches in here for all you knew. Come round a corner, I tells yer again and again, unless you knows yer all right, with yer gun ready to stab or shoot. Don't go ambling about like a nursemaid pushing the family twins."

John Mayhew preserved a discreet silence, and for a while the two men watched an aeroplane above them, and listened to the 'plop' of a British Archie, which was apparently trying to hit it. A cannon-ball from one of our 60-pounder trench mortars passed overhead, its stalk wobbling drunkenly behind it, and from the German trenches came the dull crack of the explosion; while away down the line a machine gun let drive a belt at some target. But everything was peaceful in the crater: peaceful and warm. . . .

"What have you got there, Shorty?" Mayhew broke the silence, after watching his companion for a while out of the corner of his eye. Clutched in Shorty's hand was *the* letter, at which every now and then he stole a furtive glance.

"A letter from a little gal I met in England, son. Nice little gal."

"Good. Are you going to get spliced?"

"Wal, I dunno as she's that sort." Shorty Bill frowned at the sky "She ain't . . . wal . . . she's not . . ." He seemed to have some difficulty in finding his words.

John Mayhew smiled slightly; for a mathematical genius he was very human. "I see. But perhaps if we never do anything worse, Shorty, than she's done, we'll not do so badly."

Once again did his companion sit up. "You're right, son: right clean through. They're the salt of the earth some of them girls; and I reckons it was our fault to start with. Care to see?" He paused and went on shyly, "Care to see what she says?"

In silence Mayhew took the letter, and for a second or two his eyes were a little dim. The cheap scent, the common pink paper, the pathos of it all, hit him—hit him like a blow. Two years ago he would have recoiled in disgusted contempt—the whole atmosphere would have struck him as so utterly commonplace and tawdry. But in those two years he had learned in the Book of Life; he had realised this his pre-war standards did not survive the test of Death: that *they* were the things which were cheap and tawdry. He had got bigger; he had got a little nearer the heart of things. . . .

“DERE BILL” (so ran the letter), “I likes you: better than any of the others. Why have I got to do it, Bill? I hates them, and a lady come down to-day and give me a track. Blarst her! It will always be you, Bill. Come home soon again. Rose.”

“P.S.—Am nitting you a pare of socks.”

The letter dropped unheeded from Mayhew’s hand, and his mind went back to his own leave. Then again it was the woman who had been all that mattered. She didn’t use cheap scent or pink paper—but . . .

“It’s a leveller,” he muttered. “By God! this war is a leveller.”

“What’s that, mate?” demanded Shorty, picking up his precious letter. But John Mayhew made no answer; he was back with his thoughts . . . back on leave. . . .

A little picture came to him, a picture full of that cursed cynical humour that chokes a man, and then

makes him laugh—with the laughter of a man who is in the pit. . . .

The man had driven up in a taxi just in front of him. He got out and his wife stood by him while he fumbled in his pocket for some money. Then the girl—she was just a girl, that's all, with the suffering of the world in her eyes—leant forward and touched his on the arm.

"I think, Bob, I'd like him to wait, old boy. I don't want to have to go looking round for one, after. . . .

He looked at her, and she looked away quickly—too quickly. Instinctively his hand went out towards her; then it dropped to his side, and he turned to the driver.

"Will you wait for this lady? I'm going off by the leave train." He took his bag from the man and grinned gently at his wife. "Jolly good idea of yours, old thing. Let's go and find a seat."

Round every Pullman were gathered small crowds of officers and their friends, while the wooden barrier beside the platform was crowded with men in khaki and their womenkind, each little group intent on its own affairs; each little group obsessed, with that one damnable idea—"Dear God! but it's over; he's going back again."

They met on a common footing—the women. Wife, mistress, mother, what matter the actual tie in the face of that one great fact—that helpless feeling of utter impotence. For a week or ten days they had had him, and now it was the end. There was so

much to say, and only such a little while to say it in; so many things had been forgotten, so many things they had wanted to ask about, which, in the excitement of having him back, had slipped their memory. And now, the system was claiming him again, the inexorable machine was taking him away.

Mayhew had wandered slowly up the platform, catching a word here and there. A small child held in her father's arms was diligently poking his face with a wet finger, while her mother, with one eye on the clock and another on her offspring, was speaking disjointedly.

"Ain't she a wonder, Bill? An' you will tell me if you gets yer parcels: I'm sending them regular."

"That's all right, old gal. I'll do fine."

Close beside them two flappers giggled hysterically, with their arms round the necks of a couple of gunner-drivers; and pacing up and down a youngster, with his arm through that of a white-haired man, was talking earnestly.

Mayhew, his seat taken, got to the end of the platform, and leaned against a pile of baggage. The stoker, smoking a short clay pipe, was leaning unconcernedly from the engine, and the steam was screeching through the safety-valve. Then, above the uproar, he heard the girl of the taxi speaking close by. To move meant being seen: and at such times there is only *one* man for the woman.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said; "but it's been good having you again." She raised her swimming eyes to the man and smiled. "I'm not going to cry,

Bob—at least, not very much. You will write, old man, won't you. It's all the little things I want to know: whether your servant is looking after you, and whether you're comfortable, and if you get wet, and your clothes are mended." She smiled again—a wan little smile. "You once said you couldn't tell me any of the interesting things, because of the Censor. Dear, the things I want to know, the Censor won't object to. I don't care what part of the front you're on—at least, not much. It isn't that that I want to hear about. It's just you; you, my darling. And more especially—now." She said the last word so softly that he scarce heard it.

For a while the man looked out over the network of lines into the blue of the summer's morning. To save his life at the moment he could not have spoken without breaking down, and as a nation we do not break down in public. The night before, in the hotel where they were staying—well, that is different perhaps. And the place on which we stand is Holy Ground—so let us leave it at that. . . .

"Of course I'll write, old thing," he got out after a bit, and his tone was almost flippant. "I always *do* write—pages of drivel."

An Australian beside him was kissing a girl whose painted cheeks told their own tale.

"Here's a quid, Kid," he was saying. "You'd better take it; it's about the lot I've got left."

"I don't want it, Bill." The girl pushed it away. "Oh, my God, what a bloody thing this war is! Have

I made you happy, old man?" She clung to his arm, and the soldier looked down into her eyes quizzically.

"Yes, Kid. You've made me happy right enough." He tilted up her face with his hand and kissed her lips. "Poor Kid," he muttered. "You've got a rotten life, my gal—and you're white inside. Take the bally flimsy; I wish I could make it more. I'd like to think you could take a bit of a rest. There, there—don't cry: I'll come and see you again in six months, or may be a year."

They moved away, and John Mayhew followed them with his eyes. "Pages of drivel," he repeated mechanically. "God! but this is the devil for women."

"Take your seats, please." The guard's voice rose above the din.

"Good-bye, my darling, and God bless you." For just a moment he watched the man called Bob hold her two hands, and with his eyes tell her the things which it is not given to mortals to say. Then he kissed her on the lips, and without a word she turned and left him. Once she looked back and waved—a little flash of white fluttering for an instant out of the crowd. And then a kindly taxi driver helped her to find the step she couldn't see; and the curtain had rung down once again. . . .

"It's different for *me*. No one else can feel quite as *we* do; no one else can love quite as much." With so many that thought is predominant; to so many it seems so real.

My lady, go down on your knees and thank your God that it isn't different for you—that it's just the same. You don't think so now, but it's true nevertheless. To you—just now life seems utterly inconceivable without him. To-day it seems hideous that forgetfulness can come to those we love—if the worst occurs. But the greatest gift of God is that it does come—in time. . . .

And never forget, lady, that his understanding is greater *after* than before. He wouldn't have you suffer; he wouldn't have you grieve—too much. Just for a little perhaps—but not too long. He understands; believe me, he understands. You're not being disloyal. . . .

“What d’yer think of the little gal’s letter, mate?” Shorty Bill’s voice broke in on Mayhew’s reverie. “She ain’t altogether a devil dodger’s wife, I suppose, but she’s white: white clean through.”

“And nothing else matters this outfit, Shorty.” John Mayhew smiled thoughtfully. “We were getting just a bit above ourselves before the war. We were thinking in ‘isms. You can take it from me, old man, most of these damned rituals amount to a snowball in hell when you come to the goods. We were getting a bit too complicated, Shorty; we’ve got to get simple again. We’ve got the goods here, and I don’t give a ten cent piece whether a man’s a Catholic or a sun worshipper if he just sees straight, plays the game, and takes his gruel without whining.”

“I guess you’re right, son.” Shorty produced a

dangerous looking pipe. "But speaking of being simple, there's a little thing I want to show you, which is an improvement on that throttle hold under the ear. An' it's as easy as falling off a log. What the devil are you laughing at?"

John Mayhew controlled himself with an effort. "You're never heard, Shorty, of the law of inherent connection. I know you hav'n't, old boy; so don't bother about it! Just carry on and show me this toe-hold of yours."

II

Now with Shorty Bill killing was a science. As far as was humanly possible he had eliminated chance; and though no one can ignore the rum jar and five nine which descend impartially upon the just and the unjust, at the same time, where it was man to man, the betting was five to one on Shorty. And he specialised in making it man to man. As a sniper he had been known to lie for hours—right through the heat of the day—disguised in dirt, bits of brick, and a fly barrage, waiting for his target, immovable, seemingly a bit of the landscape. As a prowler in strange places he had been known to disappear into No Man's Land, when the great green flares started bobbing up at nightfall, and return in time for stand to. He never volunteered much information as to his doings on these occasions; he rarely took any one else with him. But sometimes in the morning, after one of these nocturnal excursions, he might be seen

on the fire step, sucking his pipe and carefully making a nick in the handle of his own peculiar weapon. It was half knife, half bill-hook, and a man could shave with it.

And so, although Shorty at the moment was ruminating on love, he had not come to the crater for that purpose only. He had a little job in his mind, which he proposed to carry out that night, and it had struck him that the crater was the best place from which to conduct his preliminary investigations. It concerned a certain sap head, and the occupants thereof, and Shorty was far too great an artist to plunge blindly into anything without a very careful previous reconnaissance.

To him, in fact, it was a sport—a game; and the sport of it lay in the bigness of the stakes. The other man's life or his—those were the points, and no abstruse doubts or qualms on the abstract morality of war ever entered his head. The game is beating the Boche; and beating the Boche, when reduced to its simplest terms, is killing him. At that Shorty left it. But to some the matter is not quite so simple; to some the slaughter of the individual seems but a strange antidote for the madness of their rulers. And theoretically they are doubtless right. The trouble is that war concerns not itself with theories. There is no good indenting for timber to build yourself a dugout, if you can comfortably pinch it through a hole in the fence round the R.E. dump. It is the practical side of the question on which a man must concentrate, before he dabbles in the theoretical; and shooting sec-

ond won't help the concentration. Thus it is in hard logic; only, as I said, to some . . . it's difficult. . . .

It was in a dugout, I remember, down Arras way, that the point cropped up. It concerned killing, and the German temperament, and ours, and—one, to whom killing was difficult. Leyburn started it—Joe Leyburn of the Loamshires—who was killed at Cambrai just after he'd brained a Boche with a shovel lying outside his dugout.

"When an Englishman sees red it is the result of a primitive instinct; with the German it is the direct result of a carefully acquired training. The inculcation of frightfulness is part of their military system, and from the very nature of the brutes their frightfulness has a ring of artificiality about it."

Leyburn paused and lit a cigarette. Then, after a moment, he continued thoughtfully: "There's nothing quite so pitifully contemptible as when the blustering frightfulness collapses like a pricked bubble before the genuine article. You can see the man's soul then, pea-green in its rottenness, and it's a sight which, once seen, you never forget. It's like looking on something rather slimy—in a bottle: a diseased anatomical specimen—pickled."

"Yes, we're a nasty body of men," remarked the doctor, "but we do our little best. Am I right in supposing that there is a story behind your words, Leyburn; or is this thusness due to port?"

Joe Leyburn grinned gently. "You unholy old sawbones," he answered genially, "have we lived to-

gether these many moons, and at the end you accuse me of thusness after two glasses. No, I was thinking of little Jack Bennett. I don't know what brought him to my mind, except that I saw an account of his marriage in the paper this morning. Does any one remember him?"

"Sandy-haired little fellow, wasn't he?" remarked the second-in-command reminiscently. "In B Company for a few days after I came, and associated, somehow, in my mind with Plymouth Brethren."

"That's the man, only Plymouth Brethren is a bit wide of the mark. His religious proclivities were quite orthodox, with no leaning towards fancy persuasions. As a matter of fact when war broke out he was in training, or on probation, or whatever occurs prior to becoming a padre."

"Reading for Holy Orders is the official designation of the condition," grunted the second-in-command; "though to listen to 'em after they've done it, it defeats me what the deuce most of 'em ever read. Of all the drivelling, platitudinal ineptitudes——"

"Hush!" murmured the doctor. "We have a second-lieutenant amongst us. It behoves us to consider his susceptibilities."

Second-Lieutenant James Paton—aged forty-two—roused himself from his gentle doze. "So I should dam well hope," he remarked. "And if Joe is determined to inflict us with his yarn, for heaven's sake don't interrupt him, or we'll be here all night."

"I can't call it a yarn"—Leyburn's fingers were drumming idly on the table—"it's not one at all;

it's only a sort of psychological fragment which bears on that subject of seeing red. I was commanding B Company at the time when young Bennett joined us, and so I naturally took a fatherly interest in his welfare. He struck me immediately as being a thoroughly good type of subaltern, and his principal job in life—the platoon's comfort—came to him naturally. He was a real good boy—the way he looked after his men, and they loved him. Number Seven he had, with Murgatroyd as his platoon sergeant—you know? the fellow who stopped one at Givenchy six or seven months ago."

"When Bennett came we were out of the line—back west of Bethune—so he had lots of time to get settled down; and he was with us three months before we went over the lid again. At the time I had no idea he was anything in the Church line. He was quiet, and I doubt if the only story I once heard him tell would have amused the doctor, but . . . Sit down, Pills; you needn't bow.

"As I say, his platoon was very efficient, and he seemed in close touch with them—was, in fact, in close touch with them. Moreover he preached the platoon commander's end-all and be-all with gusto: 'Kill, Capture, Wound, or Out the Boche and continue the practice.' And so it came as all the greater surprise to me.

"We popped the parapet at dawn one morning in April down La Bassée way—small show—you were sick I think, Bill?"

The second-in-command nodded.

"Everything went like clock-work, and we got our objectives with very few casualties. Bennett had gone over with the leading wave, and he was the first person I saw when I dropped into the trench. There was a dead Boche lying in the corner, and the strafing going on was unusually mild. Bennett must have been there ten minutes before I arrived, and I was annoyed to find he wasn't doing anything in the way of superintending consolidation. I walked up to him to curse him—and then I saw his face."

Leyburn was silent for a moment or two, and his forehead wrinkled in a frown. He seemed to be seeking for the right word. "I've never seen a similar look on any man's face before or since," he went on after a while. "For a moment I thought it was fear—craven, abject fear; but almost at once I saw it wasn't. He was standing there motionless, with his eyes fixed on the dead German. His face was working like a man with shell-shock, and his right arm holding his revolver was rigid and motionless by his side.

"'What the devil are you wasting your time for?'" I asked him. 'And what's the matter with you, any way?'

"He seemed to make a physical effort to tear his eyes away from the body, and then he looked at me. 'I've killed him,' he said, and his lips moved stiffly; 'I've killed him.'

"'And a damn good thing too,' I cried. 'What's

that to make a song about? Get on with your job, and put the men on to consolidating.'

"For a time he almost seemed not to understand me; then, slowly and mechanically, he turned on his heel and walked away. I saw him once or twice again that morning, and he was working hard with his men, shifting sand bags. But on both occasions there was a look in his eyes which at the moment I hadn't the time to try and understand. Afterwards I realised it was horror."

The doctor nodded shortly. "Yes, to talk about killing and to do it are not quite the same thing. A regimental aid post would be a good and useful experience for many people I wot of."

"It was horror," went on Leyburn, "the horror of having killed a man—that expression on his face. He talked to me about it one evening after dinner a week or so later. We were alone, and he was very anxious I should understand. It was then I found out he had been going into the Church.

"'I saw him,' he told me, 'standing by the traverse—that Boche. He was looking sort of stupid and vacuous, and his jaw was hanging slack, as if he was half dazed. He was fumbling with something in his hands, and I—well, I can't say I thought it was a bomb; I can't say I really thought about anything at all. I just saw him there, and we looked at one another. Just two ordinary men looking at one another; no heat, no panic, no nothing—only he was a Boche, and I was an Englishman.'

"I remember the boy seemed almost meticulous in

his analysis of the occasion; he seemed to be trying to make a case against himself.

“‘I don’t think,’ he went on, ‘that my life was in danger. In fact, I’m certain it wasn’t. It was no case of him or me; it was just two men. And then suddenly there came to me a temptation so extraordinarily strong, that I couldn’t resist it. I don’t think —no, I don’t think I shall ever have that temptation again; but, if I ever do, the result will be the same. It was a fascination—an unholy obsession—which said to me, “You can kill that man.” And I did.’

“As he said it, Bennett’s head went forward towards the fireplace, and he stared at the flames. He was speaking in a lifeless monotone as he dissected himself for my benefit, and I didn’t interrupt him. ‘I levelled my revolver at his face,’ he continued, ‘and he watched me. He never moved—he just seemed dazed. I could see his eyes, and there was a film over them, a film of lifeless apathy. Then he moved—suddenly; and as he moved I fired. For a moment he remained standing, and then he tottered forward, and fell at my feet. It was then the unholy temptation left me; and I realised—what—I—had done.’

“‘You see,’ he told me, ‘I was going to be a parson, before the war. I was qualifying myself to preach the gospel of Christ—of kindness, of mercy, of love. I was qualifying myself to be a help to other men, to be a friend who guided them and on whom they might rely. And then came the war, and it seemed to me that that could wait. It seemed to me that

my job was to help those other men actively—by deeds not words; to lend a hand in getting the Hun under, so that such a set-back to what God would have on earth could never happen again. But thought of that sort is abstract. It was right, I know; I feel *now* that I was right—when I can get the concrete case out of my mind. That poor, hulking blighter the other day is the concrete; Prussian militarism the abstract. The trouble is that to the individual it's the concrete that fills the horizon. And, dear God, the boy got up with his hand to his forehead, 'as long as I live, the picture of his face will haunt me. . . .'"

For a while we were all silent, while Joe Leyburn filled his pipe. Then the doctor spoke thoughtfully.

"I've seen 'em like that too; in a C.C.S. sometimes one hears a man raving. It's much like one's first operation as a student."

"No, I'm damned if it is," answered Leyburn. "Then it's the natural dislike to seeing blood and mess; with young Bennett, it was something a good deal deeper. It was futile going over all the time-honoured, hoary arguments, about a sense of proportion, and the fact that there is a war on, and we're out to win it, and that there's only one way to do so. He knew all that as well as I did. His trouble was that the individual's outlook had swamped the big one: he was endowing Germans with a personality. A fatal mistake; it can't be done. If the other man surrenders—well and good; you can dabble in his personality then to your heart's content. But if he doesn't, you've got to kill him; such is the law

—and the fact that Bennett's first effort appeared to have been half-baked was—well—unfortunate. But as I pointed out to him, where the laws are brutal and primitive, you don't dally over their execution. The thing has *got* to be done, however much he disliked it. It was what he'd let himself in for, and there was no more to be said on the matter. Moreover, if he did say anything on the matter, he would be failing in his very obvious duty.

"I took that line—it seemed to be the only possible one—and the boy listened to me in silence. When I'd finished he shook his head.

"It's only because I know that what you say is right that I haven't gone off my chump," he said quietly. "With my brain I know you are correct; with my brain I know one can't stop to talk about the weather when you meet a Boche; but, with my soul, I see a woman and some kids and a half-dazed stupid face, and she'll be waiting and waiting, and—I did it." He got up wearily. "Don't worry, sir," he said; "I won't let the company down. I expect you think I'm a fool; I'm not; but the individual side of war has hit me for the first time. And as long as I live, nothing will ever be quite the same again."

"And that's the end of Part One. Doc, pass the whisky." We waited for him to fill his glass.

"Part Two," continued Leyburn, "is where the psychological interest comes in. I think we agree that most Englishmen feel much the same as that boy did—though perhaps not quite so strongly. His

case is more or less typical in its dislike to shooting the sitting bird, in its dislike of killing without the element of sport or danger. As a race we like to give the things we kill a run for their money. And as a race the Huns do not. With them it is merely a business, the same as it has to be with us; but there is this fundamental difference. We do it with compunction, as a matter of grim necessity; they do it without thought, as a matter of drill.

"Had the positions been reversed in Bennett's case, would the average Hun have given the matter a second thought? And so"—Leyburn leaned forward to emphasise his point—"to the casual observer it might seem that the Hun was the better soldier."

"Quite so, Joe," remarked the doctor, "but he ain't."

"As you say, doc, he ain't. But why? In that boy's case the thing he had done haunted him. He felt he hadn't played the game, and it showed for weeks in his eyes and his bearing. Murgatroyd, his sergeant, noticed it—and Murgatroyd was a shrewd man.

"'Let him be, sir,' he said one day to me. 'He just wants a bite in the nose—like as 'ow a terrier wants a nip from a rat—and he won't know himself.' Murgatroyd was right.

"It took place on the Somme just beyond Fricourt. I'd taken one through the knee, and was lying out watching. Suddenly I saw a Boche—a great hulking-looking blighter—with the utmost deliberation shoot two of our wounded who were lying in a shell hole. Then he started crawling away with his revolver

still in his hand. Just a business—you see—a drill. I was reaching down to pick up a rifle from a dead man beside me when I saw young Bennett. He'd got up and—regardless of the strafing—he was making for that Boche. So I pulled out my glasses and watched. His face was snarling and his teeth were showing in a fixed sort of grin; and in his hands he held a rifle with the bayonet fixed. The German saw him coming and took deliberate aim: as a matter of fact, I found out after he got him through the shoulder. But he didn't stop; he just went for that Boche with his bayonet. I saw the Hun's face, and it was white with terror. I saw his hands go up, and he was mouthing with fear. It was the slimy thing in the bottle and the red fury of the primitive man; it was frightfulness bolstered up by artificiality, and the brand that is spontaneous—up against one another.” Leyburn paused and grinned. “I watched him kill that Boche four times, and then in my excitement I slipped down the side of the shell hole.”

“Which is the reason,” said the second-in-command, musingly, “why we beat the Hun every time when it's man-to-man. Sport versus business, leading versus driving; there's only one answer, old boy, only one.”

“Precisely,” murmured Second-Lieutenant Paton, waking up suddenly. “Waiter—a lemon. I ordered some to-day specially for the grog.”

But then, it's absurd to expect a second-lieutenant of forty-two to be anything but frivolous; and any way, the digression from Shorty Bill is unpardonable.

III

We left him at the bottom of the crater with John Mayhew, sedulously inculcating his willing pupil with his improved method of throttling the wily Hun when it came to close quarters. And if there was anything incongruous in this eminent pillar of Oxford diligently striving to master the art of the garroter at the bottom of the mud hole, it certainly did not occur to Shorty Bill.

"I reckons you're not quick enough, son," he murmured reflectively as for the fourth time in succession he sat on Mayhew's stomach with *the* weapon an inch off his throat. "Your right hand, somehow, don't seem to jump to it."

"It's rather a new departure for me, Shorty," gasped the winded mathematician. "Still—I'll get it; you mark my words, I'll get it."

With a look of determination on his face he struggled to his feet and removed some of France from his face.

"It's a thing you want a lot of practice at," remarked Shorty professionally. "You can't afford to make no mistakes. Now in your gaff—teaching figures an' all that sort of thing—mistakes don't matter. You spits on the black-board and begins again. 'Ere it's different."

For one fleeting moment John Mayhew shook silently. A sudden vision of many gowned dignitaries of various ages expectorating on their morning's

labours, proved almost too much for him. Then he controlled himself, and assented gravely. If the point of view was novel to him, how much more was his novel to Shorty? And in this great citizen army of ours to-day, there is every point of view living side by side. The angles are getting rubbed off, the corners are being rounded; we're beginning to see things from the common footing. And the common footing isn't yours or mine or his—it's ours. We've all got to come into line, and realise that the big noise—as Shorty would say—of the constituency before the war, is a very small squeak in France. Wherefore don't laugh at the other man's point of view; quite possibly he's the one who should be the tooth-wash advertisement. . . .

"I will try it to-night, Shorty," said John, "if I get a chance."

"Going out on patrol, son?" Shorty was relighting his pipe.

"Yes. Are you coming? It's an officer's patrol—and fairly strong."

"Maybe I'll see you—maybe not. I was thinking perhaps I might take a look at that sap of theirs by Vesuvius mine. But we'll see." Shorty once again composed himself for rest and meditation. "Don't forget, son: your right thumb under the lobe of his ear, and get it there at once. That's your weak point." With which sage utterance Shorty apparently slept.

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Now whether John Mayhew would have been able to profit by his tutor's final words or not, was destined to remain unsolved as far as that evening's performance was concerned. But since certain things occurred which threw a little light on Shorty's proclivities, a short account of it may not be out of place. Primarily the object was to reconnoitre the condition of the Hun wire; secondarily the patrol proposed to mop up any stray Huns who should prove injudicious enough to be met. With which laudable intentions, at 9.30 exactly, an officer of the South Devons, followed by six men—amongst whom was John Mayhew—clambered cautiously from a sap head and departed into No Man's Land.

Now the officer was the proud possessor of a compass—a compass of a new and wonderful type. Its dial was luminous; in fact, it glowed like a young volcano. It was guaranteed fool-proof; it rang a bell when you did anything wrong—or almost. Which made it all the more distressing that the vendor of this masterpiece of mechanism should have—in the vernacular—sold that officer a pup. For undoubtedly that is what occurred—according to the officer. And the compass—being merely a compass—couldn't deny the soft impeachment. It couldn't even ring its bell. It could only lie in the bottom of a shell hole where the officer had hurled it in a fit of rage, and glow.

But to descend to mundane details. They reached the wire at the place where the reconnaissance was particularly wanted, and investigated stealthily. Close by they could hear the Boches talking in their trench,

and the night all around them was full of strange, whispering noises which seemed to press and crowd on their brains. The flares were lobbing up with a faint hiss; and to John Mayhew the place seemed alive. He seemed to be a dual personality. In his mind he was back in the old cloistered walls, drawing diagrams, coaching, living in his world of abstruse formulæ. Then, as he ducked motionless while one of the green lights burnt itself out, he realised the mud, and the desolation, and the death around him. It struck him as unreal that he—tutor of mathematics—could be crouching out there in the darkness with a Whitechapel costermonger breathing down his neck. Then as he moved he felt his coat tear on a strand of barbed wire, and cursed softly.

In front of him loomed the officer, and after a while he realised that something was wrong. He heard him swearing under his breath, and moved up beside him.

“This damned compass!” muttered the officer. “I’ve got five different bearings with the beastly thing already. Who’s that?”

“Mayhew, sir,” answered the other.

“Well, you’re a mathematician. How does this perishing thing work? It’s pointing South when it ought to be North.” As a matter of fact it was pointing at a large and unseen dump of Boche wire close by them in the darkness; but that is neither here nor there.

John Mayhew confessed himself defeated; compasses had been outside the realms of pure thought at Oxford.

"But over there, sir," he whispered, "where the Boche lights are going up so often, is that sap behind Vesuvius crater. At least, I think so," he added doubtfully.

The officer took stock of his surroundings. He had arranged to return to our own trenches by the same way from which he had gone, and the defection of his compass annoyed him. When the landscape is one dreary flat, when there are no marks to guide one, but only a succession of flares which bob up ceaselessly, it's easy to lose one's bearings. And butting into ones own trenches at a point where the occupants are not expecting you can be nearly as dangerous as butting into the German.

"I believe you're right," he whispered back after a moment. "And if it is, we can find our way back from there in front of that new crater."

The patrol moved cautiously forward in the direction of the German sap, from which the flares still came with monotonous regularity. And it was when they had got about half way, and were crouching low while one of the flares came down, that it struck John Mayhew that something dark and squat had moved near the sap. It seemed almost as if something had rolled off the side of the trench into the sap head—something sinister, which made him stare hard at the spot and rub his eyes. But the shadows were dancing, and at night one does see things—strange things which ar'n't there. Mysterious movements seem to be going on; bushes and mounds creep

about and dance, and a man—unless he watches it—gets jumpy.

And so Mayhew dismissed the matter from his mind and groped on in the darkness after his officer, concentrating all his thoughts on the problem of the moment—keeping touch and moving with a minimum of noise. Now, in an almost uncanny degree a man is conscious of his surroundings when his nerves are taut, and any alteration in those surroundings strikes his mind at once. Mayhew's surroundings at the moment may best be described as darkness and flares; and he was still some way from the sap when his brain realised the fact that the flares had ceased going up. As before, stray ones shot up at intervals along the front line trenches, but the sap—from which they had been coming most regularly—remained in darkness. And involuntarily his thoughts went back to that strange, sinister shape he fancied he had seen. Was it the sap party leaving the sap and coming out to prowl also; or was it——? At that moment he realised that the officer had halted and was speaking to him.

“Where is that blinking sap?” He heard the words close by his ear. “They’ve stopped putting up any flares.”

“Straight on I think, sir,” he answered. “And there’s something happened in that sap, or I’m a Dutchman.”

Which was on the face of it a somewhat foolish remark to make, considering the scantiness of the evidence; but it nevertheless hit the bull’s-eye right in

the centre. Something had happened in the sap . . . something was even then happening.

It was the officer who gripped his arm and stopped that blind grope forward.

"Look out! Not a sound!" He heard the sudden hoarse whisper in his ear. "We're right on top of them."

Very cautiously, his pulse going a little faster, he leaned forward and peered down. Even in the darkness the grey chalk of the bottom of the sap could be seen, and stretching away to their right he could see the trench as it twisted backwards to the German front line. A few wooden frames were just underneath him at the sap head, where the sentry stood normally—but there was no sentry. A couple of rifles, some bombs, and some oddments lay scattered about at the bottom of the trench; but there were no men. The sap was empty. Nothing moved. Everything was silent—ominously silent. Only a bush—a dark blob—on the other side varied the grey stillness.

John Mayhew cautiously wormed himself a little farther forward. He had no wish to stop there, but since the officer made no sign of going, but appeared to be investigating, he thought he might as well get full value for his money. And as the wooden frames at the sap head were in his way, he moved nearer the officer.

It was at that moment that a noise came from inside the frames, a noise such as a sack makes when it slips down. Every pulse in his body jumped, and

for a moment his heart raced so fast that it seemed to choke him.

“My God! What’s that?” Above the thrumming in his head he heard the officer’s hoarse whisper close by him, and in the faint light of a distant flare Mayhew saw his eyes glaring inside the frames. He looked himself, and any answer he might have made was frozen on his lips. For the sap head was not empty; it was occupied.

There was a man there, or something that looked like a man. It was dark and huddled, and a white thing that might have been its face seemed to be twisted underneath it on the ground. Then, even as they watched it, it gave another lurch and rolled over so that the white thing was hidden. But there was one thing, which was not hidden. John Mayhew watched, mesmerised, as it spread slowly over the grey chalk; spreading and spreading so slowly and so surely in the silence of the sap. . . .

“Get back!” An agonised order in his ear, and he felt himself dragged back from the edge. “There’s some one coming.”

The next moment a German came round the corner of the trench, and moved towards the sap head. John could hear him muttering under his breath as he passed—all unconscious of his danger—within four feet of him. Then suddenly came a horrified “Mein Gott!” The thing inside the box had been discovered.

The German pulled out the dead sentry and cursed. The listeners above heard him grunt as he heaved the lifeless form over; they saw—without seeing—

the thing collapse and slither again. And then—the inconceivable happened.

The bush—the dark blob—on the other side of the sap, suddenly rolled over, and fell into the trench. One moment it was there: the next it had gone. With staring eyes John Mayhew peered in front of him; close beside him the officer was breathing jerkily. There was a low worrying noise, a slight rattle as if something had hit a tin, and then silence once again. . . .

Ten minutes later the patrol was filing back into the sap from which they had started on the night's amusement. Standing at the sap head the officer counted his lambs as they dropped beside him, and having counted them he scratched his head.

"Tell 'em to fall in in the trench," he said to the N.C.O. beside him. "Damn it—the birth rate is going up."

Once again did he count his little flock, and then: "How many did we go out with, Sergeant Jones?"

"Seven, sir. Eight, counting yourself."

"Well, who the deuce is the ninth?"

"Reckon it's me, sir." Out of the darkness loomed Shorty Bill. "I joined on with your little crush, when you was coming home."

"But where were you?" queried the officer.

"Jes' takin' the air by that sap which you butted into." Shorty's tone was non-committal.

"Did you see us?"

"See you?" The darkness covered that quick grin. "Yep, sir, I saw you right enough, and heard you."

I was afraid you was going to fall into the blinking sap once."

"Was it you who—that man, that sentry . . . was it you who killed him?"

"Sure thing. An' the next perisher too." Shorty felt the edge of his own peculiar weapon. "Quite, quite dead—the pair of 'em. Which makes two less. . . ."

"Then you were that black thing—that bush?" With a hand that still shook slightly at the remembrance of that sinister squat lump which had vanished before their very eyes, the officer lit a cigarette. He still heard that worrying noise—and the gurgling rattle. He still saw the white thing peering up at him, and the dark stain that spread.

But there was no answer to his question. Shorty Bill, as was his wont, had faded away—disappeared—though no one seemed to have seen him go.

"Where the devil is the fellow?" The officer turned to Sergeant Jones.

"Gawd knows, sir," responded that worthy. "Probably asleep in his dugout by now. That there Shorty Bill is a phurry miracle."

IV

With every soldier action must come first, motive second. And with every soldier the action is very simple, though the motive may be most complex. A League of Nations may be thought about; propaganda for turning the Hun from his unpleasing rulers may

be put on foot; the right of self-determination for small nations may be shouted in high places. And very nice too.

Moreover, all these abstruse problems may be discussed and thought about by the men who have actually got to do the job. In an academic way they may be considered, along with conscription for Ireland and the position taken up by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. But they all come second. First and foremost with the soldier must come action. And while things remain as they are in this funny old world, while the Hun refuses to dislike rulers who have, on the face of it, at any rate, given him a deuced good run for his money—that action can only be of one type. Politicians may talk; novelists may decide the fate of Africa; but the soldier must either kill or be killed. In the intervals—if his mind is clear, and his brain is strong—he can follow the ramifications of intellect of those great and good men who speak so beautifully on the condition of the world as it undoubtedly ought to be. And having followed them, the poor blighter comes back to the world as it is in the shape of a carrying party for barbed wire at the R.E. dump at Hell Fire Corner. He knows—good, honest lad—how well he is being looked after. His morals, his rum, all those things which are generally a man's own private affairs, are now the subjects of impassioned debates and hysterical societies. And he appreciates it: he would indeed be a churlish fellow who did not. His appreciation even goes to the length of wishing that he might meet some of those kindly benefactors of his

—possibly at the R.E. dump at Hell Fire Corner; and that he might thank them for all they had done and were doing, and load them up with barbed wire and pickets, and lead them up the same old damned duck walk, and push 'em into the same old damned shell holes . . . just out of gratitude.

In Shorty Bill's case the motive was simplicity itself. And in its simplicity lay its strength. It wasn't a motive that would have been approved of by the Bench of Bishops; but then, honesty compels me to admit that Shorty would hardly have met with that approval himself. However, since he would have approved of them even less than they did of him, the matter is all square.

He very rarely mentioned any motive—he simply carried on and killed. But John Mayhew did get it out of him once, in an estaminet near the rest billets of the battalion. It was just after the little episode of the German sap, and Shorty had been getting one or two small points off his chest on the subject of that night's entertainment.

"Never," he remarked witheringly, "have I heard such a ruddy noise in the whole of me natural. There was I—waiting—trying to catch the faintest sound, when your procession arrives like a Cook's tour. You shouts at one another through a megaphone; very near falls into the phurry sap into the bargain. What the hell was you doing, any way, son?"

"Well, Shorty," returned Mayhew, in a slightly nettled voice, "you must admit that that dead sentry

wasn't a pretty thing to meet suddenly when you weren't expecting it."

"Pretty thing! What did you want—a tulip bed? 'E was a dead Hun, and that's better nor being pretty—it's useful."

"How did you kill him, Shorty," asked Mayhew fascinated.

"Never you mind, son. You might get trying it yourself, an' get boxed up. A little trick I learned from a cove in Nagasaki."

"We saw you go in on the second."

"I knows that," Shorty's tone was aggrieved. "It was a question of move, and move damn quick. He'd got a flare pistol in his lunch hook when I fell on him, and your little crowd would have looked pretty if he'd let it off."

Mayhew pondered thoughtfully. "The officer lost his way; his compass went wrong," he remarked after a short silence.

"Compass!" The withering scorn of Shorty's voice must have put out for ever the luminous glow of that painstaking instrument. "'E didn't want no compass; 'e wanted a nurse." With which the conversation languished.

"Do you often go round on your own like that, Shorty?" asked his companion when he had seen to the replenishing of both glasses.

"Sure thing. I reckons it's the greatest sport in the world; and besides that, I hates them bloody Huns." The two great fists spread out over the table clenched, and for a while Shorty looked out of the window in

silence. "I hates them: hates 'em like poison; and if I can reach three figures in them I've killed, before they outs me, I reckons we call it 'quits.'" Again he paused and looked out on to the street, where the lorries came bumping by and the men strolled aimlessly about.

"I had a young brother," he went on after a while, "a young fellah who was doing well in England. He was in the clerking department of some big crowd in London; messed about with figures did my young brother—same line as you."

John Mayhew bowed silently.

"When this dust-up come along Jimmy was off like a scalded cat to the nearest recruiting office: chucked up a job worth three pound a week without a by-your-leave. An' mark you, son, 'e was the goods was Jimmy. Different sort of cove to me. I guess I'll never be no great shakes; but Jimmy—'e might have done wonders. Steady and respectable; church on Sundays; in fact, I did 'ear that once he took round the bag. Which shows what he was for a young man." Shorty gazed at his companion in a kind of hushed awe, and Mayhew controlled himself.

"Undoubtedly, Shorty," he murmured. "Undoubtedly."

"Wal, as I says, Jimmy hops it—church, bag, clerkship, everything—hops it and joins up. I was over in 'Frisco at the time, and I come belting back to try and git in the same crush. And then when I lands I goes off to see the old people. Of course, I didn't cut much ice there." Shorty paused, and the tragedy of the rolling stone showed for a moment on his face.

"He didn't cut no ice at home"; everything revolved round the younger brother, who was respectable. And Jimmy was missing. So they told Shorty, the ne'er-do-well who had come to them out of the back of beyond, with the tears flowing down their furrowed old faces.

"Jimmy was missing and wounded, and then they told the old folk that he was a prisoner of war." Shorty drained his glass, and started to fill his pipe. "They sent him to Switzerland after a while," he said quietly, "and then he came home. Jimmy came home to the old people—came home to die. But before he died I saw him: the Colonel, he give me special leave. And when I saw him he told me what they'd done to him in Germany." For a moment the veins stood out in his neck, and his thoughts seemed far away. "That's why I hates them—the swine."

It may not be Christianity—but war is not Christian. It may not reflect credit on our vaunted civilisation; neither does war. It's not a pretty subject; it may not help us any nearer the coming Dawn. From an intellectual point of view the slaughter of a Boche infantryman in the front line trench has nothing much to do with the ill-treatment of a prisoner behind. But to-day—more than ever—it is not intellect that rules the world. It is sentiment, emotion, call it what you will—a feeling that springs from a deeper source than the brain. And with Shorty that sentiment was revenge. An eye for an eye was his motto—and he didn't wait for the eye to come to him. He went and took it.

"They took him, and they dumped him in a cattle-truck, son," he went on after a moment. "It was thick with filth, and there were fifty of them in it. For three days and three nights they kept 'em there—not allowing 'em out once. And Jimmy was delirious and his wounds were gangrened. They had no food, nor no drink; and when they got to their destination they was pulled out and lined up—them as could stand. Jimmy lay down, and a nice-looking woman come up to him, smiling all over her blarsted face, with some water.

"'Water, my poor boy,' says she, all kind like.

"Jimmy puts out his hand to get the cup, when that she-devil chucks it in his face—and then, not content with that, spits on him. Gawd's truth, if I could ever meet her." Once again the veins stood out on his neck.

"But maybe I've killed her brother, or her husband—or the brother or husband of one of them swine, any way." He paused to gain comfort from the reflection.

"Then, when they got him to the horspital, Jimmy, 'e couldn't walk. So they puts 'im on a stretcher, and carries him in. An' every few yards the swine in front says something, and the pair of 'em dropped the stretcher. An' 'im with his leg all shattered and gangrene set in, and a chip out of his head as well. When he moaned they kicked him; and the Red Cross women laughed—laughed like hell.

"When they got him inside they give him a bit of black bread and some coffee in a tin what 'ad been

used as a slop pail, and flung him down on a board without no blankets—nothing. Then they left him for two days without going near him. And the place was stiff with doctors. I'm glad I saw him and heard about it before the youngster died."

Shorty Bill's eyes glowed sombrely, and John Mayhew waited in silence. "I likes it—it's sport; but it's more than sport, son, with me—it's me duty to Jimmy."

With a brief "So-long," he rose and passed through the doors into the sunny street, and Mayhew watched him, with his long uneven stride and his great arms hanging loose by his side, threading his way through the traffic. And after a while he too rose, and went outside. There was a hill—a hill with grass on it and a little copse at the top, close by the village—and he turned his steps towards it. John Mayhew wanted to think. . . .

One or two of the men in his platoon hailed him as he passed them, but Mayhew hardly heard them, and they took no further notice of him. Even in the strange mixture of our army to-day he stood apart from the others, and they recognised it. There was no trace of condescension about him, but their ways were not his ways—their ideas not his. By nature a dreamer, and at the same time intensely analytical, John Mayhew was wont to subject his most cherished visions to a very searching inward examination. Shorty Bill's rank but splendid materialism had brought forcibly to his mind, once again, the old question of the why and the wherefore of this thing that

has come upon us. And it was not the cause so much perhaps as the effect which he was turning over in his mind as he reached the trees at the top of the hill, and lay down on the grass with his face turned towards the east. Far away, on the horizon, almost invisible in the haze, half a dozen sausages floated motionless; while the mutter of the guns was hardly audible above the buzzing of insects and the chattering of a family of tits who were anxiously awaiting "Feed away!" to sound. . . .

The knock-out blow—Shorty's doctrine pushed to its logical extreme. . . . Mayhew turned over on his back and closed his eyes. Was it possible, was it probable, was it worth it? Why, of course; for what else was he fighting? The crushing of militarism in Prussia, was not that the avowed object of this war? They had brought it on themselves; they were the aggressors, and as such they deserved all they got. In fact, they could never get all they deserved. Always would they owe a debt to posterity, a debt for ravaged cities and shattered homes, which no crushing defeat could ever repay in full. They had forfeited the right to be judged as free men; they had deliberately elected to assume the rôle of vandals and domineering bullies. So be it; the course was plain. They must be crushed, and only with their crushing would rest and goodwill return to a blood-stained world. Even as they had crushed Russia, so must they in turn be crushed. Let it be an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; for then, and then only, would there be peace.

Mayhew smiled cynically. What is sauce for the

goose is sauce for the gander, and he asked himself one question. Supposing the inconceivable happened, and England was the one who was crushed—would there be peace?

For ten years, perhaps twenty—even fifty. But what then? Can there be peace by repression, by conquest—permanent peace? What of Russia, when in the years to come she gradually comes into her own again, and finds herself encircled by the bonds of a conqueror? Will there be peace then? What of Alsace and Lorraine? Did the victory of '70 bring peace with it—permanent peace? And yet both nations, Russia to-day and France yesterday, were crushed militarily. . . .

Mayhew leaned on his elbow and lit a cigarette. The thing was not on the level. With Russia and France it was the aggressor who had won; in this case it was going to be the aggressor who was knocked out. That made a difference. Right and might with them had been on opposite sides; in this case they would be hand in hand. Once more did he smile cynically. The question of Right takes people different ways. The white figure of Truth is apt to appear green to one beholder and speckled to another, according to their points of view and digestions. And immeasurably foolish though they may be, there seemed to him but little doubt that the Germans regarded Right as being on their side: a point of view which the friendship of the Kaiser with the Almighty and developments on the Eastern front had done much to strengthen. Which brought our philosopher back to the beginning

of the vicious circle once again. Entirely owing to their failure to grasp an elementary truth, even when a triumphant army of W.A.A.C.'s marched down the Unter den Linden, the Germans would present the same proposition to us as France did to them in '70. Which undoubtedly made things "cruel 'ard," for a self-respecting idealist who in his spare time was being coached by Shorty Bill in the methods adopted by Levantine Greeks for shortening the lives of those who displeased them. So much for Might triumphant alone. . . .

Mayhew lay back once again on the grass and turned to the other end of the picture. And having regarded it for half a second he laughed shortly and threw away his cigarette. It may be true that this world would be a better, purer spot if Right always came out on top, though it would undoubtedly be more boring. But since the world has no desire to be either better or purer, the triumph of Right, unassisted and unadorned, must remain for the present the exclusive property of a large body of novels of revolting sentimentality, and the means by which the top-hatted villain is foiled in the Cornish fishing village by the funny man of the play, ensconced in a hollow tree.

There are some who say that Russia has tried the policy of Right in the abstract. Let us not argue on it: even if they be correct, her present condition is all there is to be said about it. In the days to come she will add Might to that Right, even as France has done to-day. But in the meantime . . . No, that won't do. Worse far than any conquest and repress-

sion, would be a peace of that nature; an attempt to impress on the Hun, by our beauty of character only, that we are right and he is wrong, and that for the future peace of Europe we should like him to agree with us. He won't. No more should we in his place. . . .

"Put it how you will," muttered Mayhew to himself, "if you're going to have another war in thirty years, it's better to be top dog during the preparation period."

And that's the point. Must the legacy of this carnage over the water be left for our children to realise all over again? Is there no method by which in truth this can be made the war to end wars? In all its details it is so utterly repulsive and hideous; in every respect it is so utterly insensate and cruel.

To achieve the result by the lofty raising of the banner of Right is the wild vision of the fanatic; but to achieve it by the military victory of Might *alone* is equally futile. There must be a combination of the two if there is to be a lasting peace. There must arise in the hearts of the great mass of Germans the certain knowledge that war does not pay. They themselves must acquiesce in the decision of the rest of the world—willingly or unwillingly—but they must acquiesce. They must see Truth as we see it, and we must see it as they see it. For if there be any rancour left on either side—and it is hard to see how the world will escape it—we are but laying up for ourselves the seeds of another war, more damnable even than this. Only by Might can they be made to see that it does not

pay; only by a fresh view of Right can they be made to realise that it ought not to pay.

John Mayhew rose and stretched himself, and with a final glance at the silent balloons which watched the Madness of Men, he strolled down the hill.

“Shorty,” he said, as he marked down that worthy buying a picture postcard, “come and give me a bit of practice in that neckhold again.”

“Sure thing, son. Feeling bloodthirsty?”

Mayhew grinned. “So so. But I’ve been thinking on abstract subjects since I last saw you. Might and Right—and how to combine ‘em into a working scheme. It’s Might first, Shorty, and Right is amongst the also rans—as far as we’re concerned. And any way, if we are all at it again in thirty years, I’ll be a special constable guarding a brewery by then.”

v

There are many degrees of nearness to the Hun in France, and each is, sooner or later, occupied by a battalion. It may be in the line, where the principal worry is the rum jar of German extraction; it may be right out, thirty odd miles, where the principal worry is the absence of the rum jar of the homelier English type. It may be in brigade reserve; it may be existing beautifully as part of the divisional reserve a bit farther back, troubled only by aeroplane bombs and the Royal Engineers, who unceasingly demand men wherewith to carry on their nefarious designs.

And of all these different localities perhaps that

which strikes the sharp contrasts of war most fully, is the one, three, four, five miles behind the front line. Up in front is silence and desolation. No living thing moves above ground, and only the tumbled earth and the ceaseless bang-bang of trench-mortar bombs show that it is populated. Away right behind everything is normal. Save for the presence of khaki everywhere the villages are as they were before the war—as much out of it as if they were in England. But in that strip, which is out of it and yet not out of it, which is in it and yet not in it, there comes the contrast. Everything goes on as usual—or almost as usual: shops are open, business thrives. Occasionally a house disappears as a Boche aeroplane circles high overhead, or a long-range gun gets a bull. But those who live close to are used to that, and almost before the dust and debris have come to earth again, *les autres* are carrying on. It may be their turn next, but *c'est la guerre*. . . .

And to these towns there come officers and men from the front, who try and pretend for the afternoon that there is no such thing as war. For the men there are recreation rooms run by the Y.M.C.A., that society whose name is for ever blessed, and the record of whose work in France should be blazoned to the ends of the earth. For the officers there is a club.

It is not what the Londoner would expect to find as a club. To the habitués of the Bachelors and the Carlton its general appearance would in all probability create a strong desire to have their money back. Not that it is very much: ten francs procures for you

a card which constitutes you a member for six months; a hundred would doubtless make you one for life, with an option on the premises themselves thrown in as a make-weight.

Two or three years ago it was the eminently respectable abode of an eminently respectable lawyer, who practised in that country town in France, as his father had done before him. They were of the North, the family of Monsieur l'avocat: a hard-headed, shrewd family, as is essential when the clients are workers in the manufacturing districts. And then there came the day when ordinary business stopped, and men stood about in bunches at the street corners, and discussed the thing that had happened. One by one, as the days passed by, the men disappeared—clients and lawyer, patients and doctor, they went into the unknown world of war, leaving the women behind to carry on. At times they return "*en permission*"; at times the news comes through, and a woman, wild-eyed and staring, rocks to and fro and tries to realise it. Verdun—le Chemin des Dames—what matter where it happened? It *has* happened, and that is all that counts to her. . . .

But with Madame l'avocat things were better. If you go into the house, and force your way through the coats which almost meet across the entrance passage, you will find a large soldier who sits at the receipt of custom. He is possibly a Highlander, possibly a Cockney, who has been lent to Madame for the time, to assure her that the official eye still smiles upon her. He sits in a little alcove off the hall, and removes your coat and ten francs, should you fail to

convince him of your membership. After that the world is open to you. On your right a barber snips ceaselessly in what was doubtless Monsieur's study, and anoints your head—unless you are firm—with powerful unguents closely resembling a gas attack. On your left the dining salon, bar, smoking, and ping-pong room combined extend to you their hospitality. And there Madame may be seen at certain hours of the day, imparting some much-needed ginger to various attendants, both male and female.

One cannot but be struck by the sound common sense of Monsieur in taking unto himself such a wife. Not beautiful—true; but is beauty required in the wife of a lawyer whose clients are coal-miners? No, no; to Madame the far better and rarer quality which enables her to cover, with perfect affability and charm, the fact that she is fully aware of how many beans, marbles, or vegetable-marrows must be produced to make the total up to five.

Her husband will doubtless be coming on leave some day, and in the meantime everything is going on very nicely. Thus does she give you to understand, as she passes from table to table. Anxious—*mais non*. She shrugs her shoulders, and one agrees with her. *Cui bono?* indeed; especially as there is a suspicion that Monsieur is very comfortably employed in Paris, where his ideas on the subject of beauty may or may not be undergoing revision.

In the meantime, what a man of common sense he is. . . .

“*Mais, monsieur, this ees no use. C'est napoo.*”

'All-enveloping, and magnificent, she politely sorts out the one-franc Rouen note and hands it back to its unhappy owner, who smiles at her ingratiatingly.

"Mais, madame," he begins gently, "it's no bally use to me either. Ce n'est pas napoo; c'est très bong."

"Oui, monsieur—c'est très bon—en Rouen."

"No go, Ginger; stung again, old man." His fellow luncher grins at Madame. "It's his hair, Madame, chevaux jaunes, n'est-ce pas?"

She smiles benignly, and nods her head. What yellow horses have got to do with the question is a little obscure; but as she has long given up the slightest attempt at understanding the remarks addressed to her in French, the point is immaterial. A good one-franc piece has been substituted for the dud Rouen note, and Madame is happy. Every one is happy, in fact—Monsieur in Paris, and the ping-pong players, and the man with a good number of *La Vie Parisienne* seated by the bar drinking a strange and wonderful concoction called a cocktail. It is made by a little boy—a fat little boy—of incredible impudence, and is unlike any cocktail ever before thought of. But what does it matter? What does anything matter save the fact that for a while you are back six miles odd behind the trenches? This evening a motor lorry will bump you up the road till you come to the dead villages, where men live in cellars and one-time houses are heaps of bricks. Guns will bark angrily all round you—angry spitting field guns from cunningly concealed positions: big ones sedate and stolid, from behind houses and coal stacks, where you least expected them.

You will curse an Archie which you pass on the road for completely deafening you; and should you know its owner you will endear yourself to him for life by asking him what he is shooting at. You will do lots of things before you finally sit down to dinner in the company mess; but that is all—this evening. Just now—well, Madame is happy, and so are you, in the little club six miles behind the lines. . . .

What matters the job that night? What matters the unpleasing conviction that you are for that delightful solace to the weary—a working party? Is not that the reason you came out to rest?

There is activity up in the dead land; there are rumours in the air that things are going to happen. And before things can happen, things where the theories of Shorty Bill are tried on a big scale, and Might comes into its own, many preparations must be made. This is no war of battleaxes and brute force; it is a war of science, and no unnecessary chances. It is a war where preparation fills 90 per cent. of the time. And those preparations are many and varied, and the success of Might depends entirely on their accuracy.

For instance, if you had wandered along Devon Lane on Monday morning you would have arrived at the junction in Number 23 Boyau—popularly known as “Fritz’s Own” owing to the large number of dead Huns who graced it with their presence. You would have perceived Number 23 forking away left-handed to the front line thirty or forty yards ahead; you would have seen Devon Lane, under its new name of

Number 22, doing the same thing towards the right. Only, as the wooden notice-boards conveying these mystic numbers had long ago been burnt for firewood, and the new tin ones had not arrived, all that you would really have perceived on Monday morning would have been the junction of two streams of liquid mud, lying stagnant and grey between their chalky walls. Here and there a few sand bags had fallen in, forming a sodden brown island at the bottom of the trench; here and there the decaying end of a trench-board sat up and laughed. If you stood on it, the other end, working on the principle of a see-saw, arose and knocked you down; if you didn't stand on it, you drowned. Which all goes to show that it was an excellent spot to spend Monday morning.

Firmly gripping his waders with both hands as he took each step, an officer plucked his way along the morass until he reached the junction. Arrived there, he leaned against the side and carefully examined a trench-map which he produced from his pocket. Then once again he struggled on up the right-hand branch of the fork. He went perhaps twenty yards, and then he stopped, and cautiously peered over the side. His eyes searched the flat sea of dirt and desolation in the hope of spotting some landmark which would serve him as a guide for the job that had to be done that night. But the quest was hopeless, and after a moment or two he felt in his pocket for his compass. Taking off his steel helmet—for accuracy was essential—he made a rapid calculation.

“True bearing of the bally trench, one hundred

and twenty degrees," he muttered. "Compass bearing—one hundred and thirty-two. That will bring us near that little mound, and——"

Ping-phat! With the agility of a young lamb the officer descended into the trench and replaced his tin hat.

"Taking the air, sapper?" said a voice behind him, and the maker of calculations turned to find the second-in-command of the battalion holding the line grinning gently. "Methought I heard a little visitor up there."

"Of course, James," returned the sapper in pained surprise, "if your snipers are so singularly rotten that they allow the Hun to interrupt me in my work, no one can blame me if the assembly trench is laid out wrong."

"Is this where we start from?"

The major thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"A cheery trench to get a working-party up at night?" he continued.

"Better to bring 'em up along the top. Our friend yonder will have closed down by then." The sapper replaced his map. "But I'm thinking we'll have some casualties to-night."

And of all casualties perhaps the working-party ones are the most unsatisfactory. In an attack a man is up and doing; he is moving, and he has a chance of doing the killing himself. In a working-party, when the men are wiring or digging, it's a different matter. They are shot at, and they cannot shoot back; they are killed, and they cannot kill back. And yet without the working-party, without the trenches where

the other men later may assemble before an assault, the attack is bound to fail. The dull preparations—out of the limelight—are as important as the final job—on the day. Such a little thing may cause such a big difference. A trench a few degrees out of the line in which it should be may throw out the direction of one wave of the assaulting troops; may bring them askew on to their objective; may cause disaster. It is the same all through. One battalion will gain its objective with thirty casualties; the one next to it with six hundred. And the reason is one machine-gun in an unexpected place, or an officer's watch half a minute wrong. *Mais—c'est la guerre!*

"To your right; Sergeant Palmer. Get that tape two yards to your right." From Boyau 22 came the muttered orders to the N.C.O. who was standing on the top. Inside the boyau, with the compass laid carefully on the side to give the direction, stood the sapper officer. Glowing faintly in the darkness, the luminous patches on the lid of his instrument showed the bearing of one hundred and thirty-two degrees, which marked the direction in which the assembly trench had to be dug. Before the infantry working-party arrived, the white tracing tape which showed them in the darkness what they had to do must be stretched along the ground. It marked the front of the trench, and on it the men would be extended at a distance of two yards. Then—dig, and go on digging till the job is done.

"That's got it. Now carry on in that line. I'll

check you every fifty yards." The sapper officer came out of the trench, and followed along behind his sergeant, who was running the tape off a stick. "Steady! Let's have a look at the direction now." With his compass in his hand he peered steadily at the white line on the ground. "Getting a little too much to the left, Palmer. Save the mark—where's that one going to?"

Both men watched with expert eyes the trail of sparks that shot up into the air from the German lines. It was the outward and visible sign of the rum jar—so called because of its likeness in appearance to that homely and delightful commodity. Except in appearance, however, the likeness was not great. The sparks continued for a while and then disappeared as the abomination reached its highest point of flight and started to descend. You can't see it—that's the devil of it. You know it's there—above you—somewhere; you know that in about two seconds, according to friend Newton's inexorable rule, it will no longer be above you. You also know that one second after it has become sociable, and returned out of the clouds, a great tearing explosion will shake the ground; bits of metal will ping like lost souls through the night; a cloud of stifling fumes will hang like a pall for a while—a cloud which will gradually drift away on the faint night breeze. Moreover, it always happens at the moment when you're waiting that you remember the poor devil who inadvertently went to ground in the same hole as the rum jar, and who was finally identified by his boots.

"It's short, I think, sir," said the sergeant.

The officer did not answer. He was listening, waiting for the soft thud which would announce the arrival of the Hun's little message of love. Suddenly he heard it—ominously near. There was a faint swishing as the rum jar came down through the air, and then a squelching thud. As if actuated by a single string, the two men dived into a shell hole and crouched, waiting.

"It's near, sir!" The sergeant just got out the words before it came. A shower of mud and water rained down on them, and the fumes drifting over left them coughing and spluttering. With a metallic ring a lump of metal hit the officer on his hat, and then once more silence reigned.

"Damned near! Far too damned near! If they're going to send over many of those, Palmer, we're going to have quite a cheery time. Where was it exactly?"

"Here, sir!" The N.C.O.'s voice came to him out of the darkness. "It's cut the tape."

Just one of the little things. Had they started from Boyau 22 a quarter of a minute after they did, that rum jar would have bagged a bigger quarry than a piece of white tracing tape.

"Knot it together. We must be getting a move on, Palmer. The working-party will be here soon."

It was a quarter of an hour later, to be exact, that the two men retraced their footsteps along the tape towards Boyau 22. No more rum jars had come to disturb them; only the great green flares had gone on

continuously lobbing up into the night. From away to the south, where the horizon flickered and danced with the flashes of the guns, there came a ceaseless, monotonous rumble; but at Devon Lane all was peace. Everything was ready for the alteration of the landscape; only the actual performers, who would prepare fresh vistas for the beholders on Tuesday morning, were absent.

The sapper officer looked at his watch.

"Very nicely timed, Palmer. I hope they're not late."

To those who are wont to think of war as an occupation teeming with excitement the digging of an assembly trench by a working-party will probably seem a singularly flat entertainment. And, in parenthesis, one may say that it is the heartfelt wish of all the performers that it will prove so.

Since work of that sort fills by far the greater part of the madness called war, and since the appetite for excitement of the death-or-glory type is more prevalent in stories than in reality, all that the average digger asks for is easy soil and a quick finish.

But let us labour under no delusions. There is room during the night's work for enough excitement to satisfy the veriest glutton; and though the occupation would not thrill crowded houses at the "movies" if it were filmed, it can be jumpy—deuced jumpy! Things do happen.

Suddenly the metallic clang of a pick on a shovel

made the sapper look up, and at the same moment a low voice hailed him.

"Are you there, sapper? The men are behind."

There is something oddly mysterious in watching a party filing past in the darkness. The occasional creak of equipment, the heavy breathing of the men, the sudden curse as some one slips—all tend to help the illusion that one is watching some sinister deed.

They crowd on one out of the night, looming up in turn, and disappearing again into the darkness. Now and again, as a flare lights up everything, the whole line becomes motionless. Crouching, rigid, each man waits, with the green light shining on his face.

Away—right away—until one loses it in the night, runs the line of silent men. Just so many units—that's all; so many pawns in the great game. In a moment, when the darkness comes again, they will be passing on, these pawns, once more; they will have become dim shapes, squelching by.

But just for that moment it's different. The human touch comes in; the man stooping beside one is an individual—not a pawn. Perhaps there's a smile on his face; perhaps there's a curse on his lips. Perhaps he's a stockbroker; perhaps he's a navvy.

But, whatever he is, whatever he looks like, for the moment he is not a shape.

He is an individual; and he—that individual—may be the man to stop a stray bullet before the dawn. But then, for that matter, so may you. So what's the use of worrying, anyway?

"Been quiet up to date?" The officer in charge of the working-party strolled slowly along the line of digging men with the sapper. The chink of a pick on a stone, the soft fall of the excavated earth, the dim line of figures bending and heaving, bending and heaving, silently and regularly, showed that the night's work had begun.

"A rum jar unpleasingly close was the only excitement," returned the sapper. "But there's plenty of time yet, so don't despair."

"Gaw lumme!" A hoarse voice from just in front of them made them stop, and they saw one of the men peering into the hole where he was digging. "Gaw lumme! 'Erb, we've struck the blinking bag of nuts 'ere!"

The information apparently left 'Erb cold. "Wot's the matter?" he demanded. "Got a Fritz?"

"Not 'arf, I ain't! Lumme! Ain't 'e a fair treat? 'Idden treasure ain't in it!"

But the two officers had not waited for further explorations. With due attention to the direction of the wind, they faded away, and left the proud discoverer to his own devices.

"How the devil," remarked the sapper, "some of these fellows can stand it I don't know! That Hun was guaranteed to make a Maltese goat unconscious at the range of a mile."

"I remember taking over a line once where the parapet was revetted with 'em," said the infantryman. "It's all a question of habit."

And so is most of this war—a question of habit.

Where Death is such a common visitor, it stands to reason he loses much of his horror. If it were not so, men would go mad. But, mercifully for them, a callousness numbs their sensibilities, and the dead are just part of the scenery. It will not last.

In time the crust will break away, and a man's outlook on life will become as it once was. The things that are happening over the water will seem to them then a dream, and the horror of that dream will be glossed over by the kindly hand of Time. Only a certain contempt of Death will remain—the legacy of their present mood.

"Clang!" The noise came distinctly to the two officers standing for a few minutes in Devon Lane.

"That's it!" said the infantryman irritably. "Let's have a brass band while we're at it. A machine-gun on this little lot, would be the deuce."

"There are a lot of stray rifle bullets coming across," remarked the other. "I wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't one of them getting busy."

They scrambled out of the trench, and even as they got on the top the ominous order for stretcher-bearers came down the line.

"Who is it, Sergeant Ratcliffe?" said the infantryman.

"Don't know, sir. Some one up the other end, I think."

To be exact, it was 'Erb. There lies the impartiality of it all. It might have been the finder of the bag of nuts; it might have been any of the two hundred odd men stretched out along the tape. Just a stray, un-

aimed bullet loosed off by a sentry into the blue, and 'Erb had stopped it.

They found him lying on the ground, and because he was a man, and a big man, for all his shortness, he wasn't making a fuss. Just now and again he gave a little groan, and his feet drummed feebly on the ground. Around him there crouched three or four others, who, with clumsy gentleness, were trying to make the passing easier.

"Don't bunch, men." The infantryman's voice made them look up. "The stretcher-bearers are coming, so get on with your job."

He knelt down beside the dying man.

"Where were you hit, lad? They'll be here for you in a minute."

"No use this time, sir. I've blinking well copped it through the back!" His voice was feeble, and as he finished speaking he groaned and moved weakly. "Lumme! And I was due for leave!" The words trailed away into a whisper, and the officer, bending over him, caught a woman's name.

Screening the light with his body, he flashed his torch for a moment on to the man's face. Then he stood up, and the sapper beside him saw him shake his head.

"None so dusty, Liza. You weren't much to look at—but"—once again he was silent—"it ain't fair, sir—it ain't fair—not altogether."

"What isn't, lad?" The officer bent over him.

"My cousin, sir. Ten pounds a week. Unmarried. Blarst him!"

Ten seconds later the stretcher-bearers arrived, but the soul of 'Erb had already started on the Great Journey. And if he went into the Valley with an oath on his lips, maybe the Judge is human. It ain't fair—not altogether—

Such are the little thumb-nail sketches of the game over the water. There are thousands similar, and yet each one is different—for each one is the tragedy of the individual to some one. The stretcher-bearers took him away, and later, in one of the military cemeteries behind the line there will appear a cross, plain and unpretentious—"No. 1234 Private Herbert Musson. The Loamshires. R.I.P." But that is later. At present all that matters is that 'Erb has copped it, and the blinking trench has got to be finished.

It's got to be used, that trench, in a few days. Men will have to sit there and wait. The shells will be screaming over them, the ground will be shaking—one of the show-pieces of war, beloved of the newspaper correspondent, will be about to start. And unless the trench has been finished, and finished correctly, by the 'Erbs, the show-piece may fail.

So that if you regard 'Erb as a pawn, the price is not great. Unfortunately, to Liza he's an individual. And that is the tragedy of war.

VI

Now Shorty Bill liked digging as little as any one else. He agreed to the full with Oscar Wilde's

profound aphorism that man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. But once get it into his head that a job had to be done, and he did it—cheerfully. And in that last word is contained the very essence of the good soldier. . . . More than that, it is the doctrine of Life.

“Grin, son, grin.” Thus Shorty’s constant exhortation to all and sundry. And surely it’s the only sermon that matters a curse—grin. “I guess I’m no great shakes on the religion stunt—but grin, you perisher, grin.” Thus did he unofficially join forces with the padre, and they became sworn friends. Because, when two men of understanding meet little things don’t matter much. It’s the main big thing that counts, and on that they agreed—right away. And Shorty altered his whole opinion of the Holy Catholic Church.

It was one Sunday morning that Shorty found himself occupying a front seat in the divisional canteen, while Divine Service was in progress. In his exalted position sleep was impossible, but his mind had wandered during the performance to the relative number of notches on his rifle and his own peculiar weapon. The padre was talking, and Shorty heard him half consciously. He was a new man, and to Shorty just a mere devil dodger like the last. Then, suddenly, came the revelation: and Shorty very nearly created a scene by cheering.

“Well, you fellows, I am not going to talk to you any more this morning.” The padre shut his book with a bang. “All I want to get into your heads is the one word ‘Grin.’ Keep smiling, boys; be cheerful

—no long faces. ‘Grin.’ We will now sing Hymn Number 24 in the little book—and let drive, boys, let drive. Take the top off the tent. Ah, bless the dog! . . .” The remaining words of the speaker were lost in the slight confusion that was caused by a large yellow dog—temporarily running amok—which had become entangled in his surplice, and had deposited him forcibly between two large beer barrels just behind the little platform on which he was standing.

But what matter? A crack piano wheezed out the tune, the padre plucked from his face two cases of woodbines and a cake of soap, which had accompanied him in his rapid descent, and then with his clear strong baritone he led off with the opening words. That mighty roar which comes when a battalion—or all of it that the canteen marquee will hold—starts to sing; that slow grand volume of men’s voices, which brings the glint of perhaps long-forgotten things to the eyes of those who hear, rolled out, drowning the piano, glossing over the fact that at least three of the most important notes were—in the vernacular—napoo. The peasants, clustered in the doors of the little village street, listened silently; and though the guns were speaking just as usual, and along the *pavé* a motor lorry was stolidly bumping, for the moment war was forgotten. Not their creed, it’s true; but what are creeds and schisms when the Great Reaper is at every man’s side—day and night? And if they thought of it at all, maybe they realised that the same Power Who gently receives their widow’s mite, their sou, their little offering at the shrine opposite, where the glass is

cracked and the weeds are growing—the Power Who in their trusting faith will bring them back their Jacques, their Pierre; even that same Power is listening to the hymn that rolls out from the tent near by. The means are different; the results are the same.

A great Amen rings out into the frosty air, and from inside the tent there comes a sudden peculiar shuffling which may be heard once during every service in a military church. It is the men moving their feet to come to attention, and the signal is one note from the cracked piano. Then once again the singing starts, and the peasants nudge one another as they recognise the tune. It is the English "Marseillaise"; it is "the King." Two minutes afterwards the men stream out; hats are put on, markers are called for. A word of command, and the battalion swings away down the road; the service is over. The canteen resumes its normal appearance, and even while the padre is removing his belongings and putting them in his little bag, a stoutish gentleman of uncompromising aspect, who officiates behind the bar, comes back to his lawful domain. . . .

Thus was formed the alliance between the padre and Shorty: which endured until death. As a clergyman of the orthodox Church of England giving tongue to the virtuous of Slupton-under-Slush, I would have reckoned him a non-starter. But as a padre amongst men, where the game is your life or the other man's, where the conversation is not that which holds in the drawing-rooms of respectability—though a damned sight less noxious in many cases—where rum and beer

replace lime-juice and tea, and a man is all the better for them—there, I say, he was a prince among men. He was worth an army corps to his side.

It was his cheerfulness that was such a godsend; nothing ever perturbed him. A smiling face in France is worth a bottle of champagne every time you see it; and if a man can't smile naturally he should go into a secret place and practise daily. His conjuring entertainment, for instance, was worth a small fortune to every one who saw it, owing to the wild hilarity which greeted it. For a few hours he helped the men to forget, which is the sole object of all the concert troupes and cinemas behind the line. They are not a sign, as some misguided individuals apparently think, that we do not take the war seriously in France: they are the very wise result of a very human man who understood the psychology of those under him. And so the padre conjured.

I have forgotten most of the tricks he failed to do—for let me say at once he was no expert. One only I remember clearly, and that was the last, though there were many others. The watch which turned into a rabbit and back again he had unfortunately smashed with a hammer owing to hitting the wrong bundle; and in the excitement of the moment the rabbit had escaped, and died dreadfully at the back of the hall. On every occasion he had named the wrong card amidst howls of delight; and then came the last one—the vanishing billiard ball.

Unabashed by his past failures, and with his face shining joyfully, the padre advanced and addressed the

audience. O'Toole—the wild Irishman—whom the padre had roped in to help him, was dancing in the wings with excitement as the *bonne bouche* of the performance approached. For the benefit of the uninitiated I might explain that the trick consists of rubbing a billiard ball between one's hands until it gradually disappears. Its resting-place is really a small bag—hung like a sporran—of the same colour as the performer's trousers, into which, by deft manipulation, the ball is dropped.

"Now, boys," began the performer, "I come to my last trick. A wonderful trick! I have been offered thousands to give away the secret. You see the billiard ball; no delusion—a nice good-looking billiard ball. I propose to make it vanish before your eyes, by rubbing it between my hands. Quite easy; no deception. I just rub and rub and rub—and there you are."

"Only too true," murmured the colonel, as with a loud crash the ball ricochetted off the conjuror's foot, shot across the stage, and came to rest amongst the orchestra. "I only hope it hasn't smashed the big drum."

"That's the worst of these French billiard balls," remarked the performer, quite unmoved. "I'll just try it once again—with the red this time."

Once again a breathless silence settled on the audience. The padre rubbed and rubbed, and the billiard ball was slowly brought down towards its final resting-place.

"It's vanishing," howled an enthusiast from the front row. "It's gettin' smaller, every second."

Lower and lower came his hands, and the excitement became painful. As every one knew the trick, the betting on whether he'd get it in the bag or not was fast and furious. Shorty Bill was heard making a book half way down the room, in the intervals of shouting advice to his ally on the stage—and then O'Toole spoiled it all.

With a loud shout he dashed in from the wings, carrying in his hand the little bag the padre had forgotten to put on. With an agonised dive he caught the ball as it crashed, and stood up triumphantly.

"'Tis gone, padre, dear, gone entoirely this trip. But 'shure I was only just in toime with the little bag. . . ."

And thus, while he was with us, did a very gallant gentleman play the game. Always did the entertainment finish the same way. Gradually silence would settle on the audience, and the padre—standing on the platform—would watch the rows of upturned faces through the grey blue of smoke. His eyes grave and quiet, with the kindly glint of a God-sent humour in them, seemed to search each individual heart in the room; for to each of them he was a personal friend. Gently at first, then swelling to a mighty roar, one or two of the old, old songs would roll out into the night. Not ragtime then—that came earlier in the evening—but the songs that count, and that mean something to a man when he hears them, wherever he is, who-ever he may be, saving only that he shall be British.

The songs that conjure up the red lanes of Devon, and the crags of Cumberland; the marshes of the fen country, and the rolling downs of Sussex; the songs that conjure up England to men whose steps have led them to the Lands beyond the Mountains. For they tell of the glory of our island—the glory which is eternal, the glory which can never be dimmed. And to every one of her sons they come as a whisper of what has been, is, and ever more shall be. . . .

Then at the last the padre would raise his hand, and in the solemn hush his strong, clear voice would start some well-known hymn. Shyly at first, for the words were unfamiliar, the men would join in. To some it meant but little, to others the years rolled away and they were back again in the mists of memory, in the land that is peopled with glorious chances. Perhaps it was the little cottage with the smell of peat in the room, and the harmonium wheezing in the corner while the sun set in a blaze of golden glory over the purple hills; perhaps it was a great cathedral, with the choir boys' voices stealing softly out of the grey dusk, and a woman kneeling close beside; perhaps it was just a nursery, and a fire, and a Mother. But whatever it was, however bitter the contrast with the present, for just a fleeting second a man might draw near to God, and in drawing near—forget. I have seen a hardened rascal, the despair of his officers, wiping his eyes surreptitiously with the back of his hand; and what matter if he was on the mat again next day? For just a moment he had been as a little child, and

there had been granted to him the tears that cast out bitterness. And there is no more precious gift. . . .

But we lost our padre, though the spirit he left behind him will never be lost. He died as he would have wished to die, alongside the men he loved . . . The stretchers-bearers had brought in a remnant to the dressing-station—a remnant with the flicker of life still in it. It was beyond human aid—that poor, mutilated fragment—as it lay in the light of the guttering candles breathing in stertorous gasps. There were other things for the doctor to do: and so the padre sat beside the thing that had been a man half-an-hour previously. The padre knew his history, at least as much of it as any one did. For there are many who are not given to talking of the past. . . .

In the ranks of the old Army one occasionally met the man whose hands bore traces of having, at one time or another, been used to the attentions of the manicurist: whose accent was not as that of those with whom he lived, whose eyes when they met those of his officer held in them that cynical glint, that nameless something which told its own tale. Sometimes they made good those gentlemen rankers, and sometimes they found what they sought—the sniper's bullet fighting on the outposts of Empire, at the back of beyond. More often the latter, for they were a hard-bitten crowd, and black sheep—tired black sheep—have a way of remaining black to the end.

In the ranks of the new Army, things are different. To-day, where all classes and types are bound together in the one big family of the Regiment, where the

grocer's son has a commission and the stockbroker is in the ranks, the same contrast does not exist. When a private can read Virgil, and the platoon commander cannot write English; when a corporal has earned four figures annually as a flat-race jockey, and the sergeant has been in Holy Orders, things are apt to get a little mixed. And yet even now, just as formerly, the black sheep are there. More hidden perhaps, harder to find, but there just the same, with the same cynical glint in their eyes—only sometimes when no one is looking it's tired, not cynical; with the same indefinable set of the shoulder, with the same half-humorous twist of the mouth. These are not your 'Varsity experts; these are not your stockbrokers and other men of gentle birth who have joined the ranks. These are the men who have made a mess of things before the war: the men who came to grief in the game of life, and who don't care if they come to grief in the game of death. . . .

And it was such an one the stretcher-bearers had carried in. What matter the failure now? It was over—the piteous maimed thing was just part of the price.

And there are those who talk of the Glory of War; of our jesting soldiers. . . . There can be no Glory against high explosive: the jest but covers a heart—sick or callous—according to the nature of its owner.

"I . . . did . . . try." The padre saw he was speaking more through the eager look in the glazing eyes than by anything he heard.

"What is it, boy?" he asked leaning forward. Overhead the shells were carrying on the same old

game of mutilation, and the roof of the dressing-station shook with each concussion.

"No use, padre. I never had a fair chance." The feeble voice carried on, and then was silent. For a few moments it seemed that the fragment had found peace—it lay so still.

The doctor paused for a moment as he passed. With the sweat dripping off his forehead he had been working continuously for eight hours, and his face was drawn and haggard. As fast as he got the men away in ambulances, others came in to fill their place. Men wheezing and choking with mustard gas—blistered and burning where the liquid had caught them: men shot through the stomach—men shot through the head: men with a leg torn off by a bit of a shell—men with an arm hanging by a thread. Silent mostly: though every now and then a piteous moan would be wrung from some wretched sufferer. It was hell—just a corner of it: a corner where I would that some of our wretched German lovers might spend an hour. For though it is the same on the other side—*the Hun started it*. . . .

"Can you come over here, padre." The M.O.'s voice was tired. "You can't do anything there; and there's a sergeant. . . ."

Then it came. One of the crumps that had been falling all about the aid post struck the roof. To any one seeing it from outside it was much the same as any other crump. A few sheets of corrugated iron flew upwards in the black cloud of smoke; the passers-by ducked and then passed on. But inside . . . no

words can describe it; no brush could paint it. It was utterly hideous: a shambles—reeking and bloody. It was war; the product of Kultur. A few things crawled out moaning; but for the rest. . . .

Thus did a Failure cross the Great Divide, with our padre at his side to help him. And thus for two days did they lie together—with those others—until Shorty brought his ally back. No one has ever heard what Shorty did during those two days and nights; no one ever will. But he came back with the padre slung over his shoulder, and a look in his eyes which forbade any questions. His head was gashed, and he had a bullet through his leg, but on his own peculiar weapon were a row of notches which had not been there before. And when, a few days later, the line once again advanced and the ground in front became the ground behind, the burying parties—callous though men become of such things—told some strange and fearful stories of what they had found in odd shell holes. Of course it was nothing to do with Shorty; but then, the little bunch of wild flowers in a jam tin on a grave way back behind was nothing to do with him either.

VII

And now let me turn for a while to another of Shorty's friends—and one who, incidentally, was also a friend of mine. They were an ill-assorted collection—those friends of his—from a social point of view; but they all had one thing in common. They

were Men—in the Land where Men are wanted. And that is enough. . . .

I met him quite unexpectedly in the course of a wander along a slowly moving mass of sticky glue which was falsely known as a trench. Misguided optimists at head-quarters were wont to speak gaily of revetting and deepening, of constructing fire steps and building up the parados with special attention to the berm—and having spoken they concluded that it was so. It wasn't; it remained mud. It will remain mud to the end.

And so one morning, plucking my way along this delectable resort, I encountered another plucker. He was one of those who carried out the deepening programme; I was one of those who reported that he had, and if he and his laughed as consumedly over his work as I did over my reports, they must have had a merry time. With his sleeve rolled up he was delving into an apparently bottomless hole filled with slush, and I waited for him to finish. As a matter of fact I had already walked fifty yards, and being therefore completely exhausted, I sat on an island for a space and communed with the company commander who was going round with me.

It was then that the delver, having discovered the boot, mess tin, or what not which was the cause of the dredging operations, looked up, and our eyes met. Encased as he was in a layer of dried mud, I might have passed him by—khaki is a wonderful alterer of men. But a sudden grin on his face as he looked at

me made me glance at him again, and instantly I recognised him.

"Well, Pete," I said, "how goes it?"

"Nicely, thank you, sir," he answered. "I 'opes yer orl rite yerself, sir."

"I've been worse," I assured him. "How's Kate? The last time I saw her, she was rather angry with me, if I remember aright."

He grinned again. "She sees things different now, sir. She was that pleased over this 'ere, there weren't no 'olding 'er." "This 'ere," I ultimately discovered under the prevailing camouflage of filth to be the ribbon of the Military Medal.

We talked a bit longer and then we left him to continue the round.

"What sort of a fellow is he?" I asked my companion when we were out of earshot.

"First class—one of the best. The only trouble is that he's very intolerant of authority, especially N.C.O.'s." I grinned gently to myself. "But a good man; always doing some stunt of his own, that's got a bit of excitement in it. Did you know Smith before the war?"

"Smith? Is that his name?" I returned guardedly.

It was the second-in-command's turn to grin. "That is the name under which he has enlisted."

"A rose by any other name," I mumured. "I certainly knew him before the war, but not as Smith."

"And what was he?"

"Well—he was always doing some stunt of his

own," I returned. "And he was, as you say, intolerant of authority."

We wandered on, and the conversation closed. But that evening, having reported for the fifteenth time that work was proceeding on Acacia Avenue, and that the further time required for completion was five years or the duration, my thoughts came back to "Smith." Although I have no doubt his case is not unique, yet it may be of interest to some who are students of human nature. There is no story with a plot about him; he just was and, as far as I know, is, which is all that can be said of most of us. . . .

It was some time in 1908 that an unmerciful fate decreed that I should spend two days of hard-earned leave with an aged aunt who lived in Hampstead. In addition to having to lie on one's bedroom floor and blow the smoke up the chimney if one desired a cigarette, there had been obtained, with great forethought, a bottle of invalid port, which must have cost at least two shillings. The combination of these two things, and the hoarseness attendant on talking to her at dinner—she was stone-deaf—brought me to such a state of hilarity that I came to the conclusion the only fitting crown to such a crowded evening was to slip gently out of the dining-room window after she had retired for the night, and repair rapidly to a night club. The matter was one requiring care, as I knew the betting was about even on me and the Cat's Home at Upper Balham for the principal share of the old lady's boodle; and I therefore decided on eleven-thirty as the earliest possible hour to start.

It was just as I was tiptoeing past the dining-room door at a quarter to twelve that I heard a movement inside, and the faint chink of silver being moved. The matter somewhat naturally I regarded as a personal affront; the silver, at any rate, would be mine, even if the Feline Sanatorium took the rest, so I faded rapidly up the stairs again to obtain a revolver, which by the merest fluke was in my kit. It belonged to a fellow who was going to shoot at Bisley, but it came in very handy that night. . . .

Adopting a bold demeanour I flung open the dining-room door, and switched on the light.

"Keep quite still," I urged him; "but for the Lord's sake don't drop that plate about. You'll dent it."

He was a cheery-looking fellow, and he grinned all over his face.

"Put the pop-gun away, guv'nor," he remarked kindly. "It's a fair cop, and it might ruddy well go hoff."

As I knew it was unloaded the contingency failed to frighten me.

"'Ave yer sent for the perlice?" he demanded.

"No," I said, "I have not. And provided you behave yourself I don't propose to. Sit down there at the table."

We sat down facing one another, and he produced a packet of "gaspers."

"For the love of Heaven don't smoke," I cried. "I'd be cut out of the will for a certainty. But I'll give you a bottle of very fine old port if you like."

He accepted it, and I breathed again, which is more than the burglar did after the first mouthful.

"Gaw Lumme! wot's this?" he spluttered. "I thort you said port."

I smiled and felt better. "Sorry you don't like it," I told him, "but my aunt got it from the grocer this morning in exchange for ninety-three soup square labels."

He looked at me suspiciously. "Wot the 'ell are you doing in a 'ouse like this?" he demanded. "The old gal don't never 'ave no one to stay—leastways, no man."

"I might ask you the same question," I reminded him, "except that the object of your visit is a little obvious. Do you usually specialise on the houses of lonely old women?"

"Cheese it, guv'nor; I've got to live, ain't I? And I reckon you're only 'ere for wot you can git out of the old trout, so there ain't much difference between us."

I confess that the point of view was novel, but as it was nearer a bull's-eye than I altogether liked, I changed the conversation.

"Is this your first effort?" I asked him.

"First! No, it ain't. I'm listed at the C.R.O., I am."

"And what may that be?"

"Criminal Records Horfice," he returned sullenly. "But don't yer try any dam soft talk on wiv me; for I ain't taking any. I don't want none of yer repentance stunt."

I reassured him of my complete inability to preach

repentance to any one, and after a while he forgot his suspicions and we talked. We talked till four, did Pete Jobson and myself, and between us we even finished the port.

The beginning had been the usual thing—foul surroundings. A temporary respite for a few pennies could be obtained at the movies, where one lives in a whirl of explosions and Red Indians, and no one moves with less than three revolvers and a bowie-knife; but temporary respites of that sort are dangerous. The high-spirited boy sees the daily round of soul-killing, slave-driving monotony to which the virtuous of his own kind are driven, and he rebels.

With a proper environment and training, possibly the result would be different; as it is, the boy drifts naturally to the almost inevitable finish. And in time he is listed at the C.R.O.: he is a marked man, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.

At least, that is how he feels on the matter, and encounters with well-meaning bores, who entreat him to repent and turn from the evil of his ways, do nothing to remove the impression. One cannot expect cause and effect to be too clearly outlined in his mind; one cannot expect him always to realise that his present unenviable position is entirely his own fault—that he started the ball rolling so to speak, and he cannot complain now that society has continued the game.

“My very worst frind, from beginnin’ to ind,
By the blood av a mouse, was mesilf!”

And yet, was it entirely his own fault? Are those who preach quite certain that had they started in the same position, the result would not have been the same? The question is a big one, and we are not concerned with it at present. So let us leave generalities and come to the case of Pete Jobson, as I got it from him that night.

He was a husky young devil, and possessed of a nimble brain; and had he been given a fair start he might have done well. As it was, however, at the age of twenty-one, the C.R.O. had marked him down, and the oft-waged fight began yet another unequal contest. After all, the man has such a very small chance.

From twenty-one to twenty-three the outside world had not troubled Pete. A little affair out Ealing way, a little blunder, and—the inevitable. He was met at the door of the prison by a kindly gentleman, who told him to keep up heart, and gave him a tract. And there at once you get the two sides of the case; which are both so easy to understand. That gentleman meant well—though it's a dreadful indictment to fling at any one: he meant well. Honestly and conscientiously he was doing what he thought to be good and helpful. To Pete the whole incident was as a red rag to a bull. For a tiny blunder he had been juggled for two years—two of the best years of his life; and rightly or wrongly, he felt Fate had treated him unkindly.

So with great and unceasing fluency he cursed that kindly gentleman, and his tract; he mentioned other kindly gentlemen and their tracts, and then he felt

better. Which, of course, was all very wrong, and showed an unrepentant spirit. . . . But, how very natural! . . .

I gathered that he had a certain standard of his own—had Pete. If he relieved a wealthy Hebrew in the suburbs of some surplus table silver, and his wife of a ring or two, no one was really hurt by the transaction, and Pete was benefited. If some one was mug enough to try and spot the lady coming up from Epsom in the train, when Pete was manipulating the cards—well, surely enough has been said about the three-card trick by now to give knowledge to even the most unsophisticated.

But—one night, he had visited a house in Earl's Court, and as he was leaving with the very diminutive amount of booty he had been able to collect, the light was switched on, and a woman—a middle-aged woman—came into the room.

"I am all alone except for a maid-servant in the house," she said quietly; "but would you not take that silver tray. It was a wedding present I greatly value, and my husband was killed at Majuba."

Pete looked at her hard as she stood there, and her eyes met his without flinching. "You've pluck," he said at length. "I likes pluck. Why didn't yer ring up at the station?"

"Because I don't want you to be put in prison, even if they caught you." Pete looked at her suspiciously. "There are so many hundreds of people who are doing the same as you, and who live in large houses; and so many thousands who might be but for some little freak

of fate, that I don't think it's fair. So I ask you as one person to another, not to take that tray. That's all."

"Strite?" The training of a lifetime is not shed in a moment.

"Straight," she answered.

"Then 'ere you are. Take the 'ole lot back." He was gone before she could speak again; which was Pete—his way, though it was like opening an oyster to get that yarn out of him. . . .

At four a.m. we parted the best of friends. "Come dahn to Lower Dock Halley, guv'nor," were his last words to me as he faded through the window. "The Dancing 'All. I'll look after yer."

And so one night, having nothing better to do, I went, albeit with some trepidation, to the Dancing 'All in Lower Dock Alley. Visions of mysterious disappearances floated through my mind as I wandered through a network of unpleasant streets; and my perturbation was not diminished by the kindly words of P.C. 34, from whom I enquired the way. I think his number was 34, though I am not sure. But I looked at him closely, I leaned upon him mentally, I felt loath to leave him—that large imperturbable P.C. 34. He exuded an atmosphere of safety which, mingled with that of fried fish from a shop near by, reminded me of home. I speak metaphorically: we are really rather particular. . . .

"Going to Lower Dock Halley?" said P.C. 34. "Second right, third left, and I wouldn't."

"Wouldn't you?" I remarked nervously. "I've got a friend there."

P.C. 34 became professional. "'Ave you?" he said; and I fancied my reputation had suffered. "Well, don't say I didn't warn you."

I assured him I would be most careful what I said, and we parted, effusively on my part, a trifle coldly on his. I felt he regarded me as outside the pale, and the half-crown's worth of hush money I pressed into his hand failed to remove his displeasure altogether.

And so I came to the Dancing Hall. It was a big room and one end was filled with small tables. At the other end of the room a piano and a violin supplied the music for the couples who danced in the open space, and without going any farther than the musicians themselves the psychologist might have amused himself for quite a while.

They were father and daughter, the players, and the girl played the piano. She had no technique, but technique is not required in an East End dancing saloon; she had, however, the divine touch of the artist, and that is. It came from her father, who sat beside her, drawing the music of the gods from his fiddle—and drunk, hopelessly drunk.

"There was a time, sir," he would say magnificently, "when I could command my own price. The Queen's Hall, the music-halls, even the Albert Hall, I have played in them all; and now—you perceive the straits I am put to; I and my daughter—to play here! He shrugged his shoulders magnificently. "Entirely bad

luck, my dear sir, which has ever dogged my footsteps."

"Cheese it, father; it's drink, and yer damn well knows it." Wearily the handsome black-eyed girl would sit down and vamp the beginning of a ragtime stunt. "Come on, come on; no yer don't; not another till this is over."

Apogetically, with a wave of the hand which invited you to sympathise with him in the buffeting of life, a great artist would sit down and hack out some popular rag: hack it out from a cheap violin, with hands which had once held a Strad; hack it out with lack-lustre eyes—eyes which had once glowed with the fires of genius. But sometimes, if you were very lucky, he would forget his surroundings, he would forget everything save the gift which is God-given, and gradually a silence would settle on the room. Lost to everything save the glory of his art, he would play—that man who was. The greasy waiters would move on tiptoe, and men would stare motionless at sights which came to them out of the past, and women would let the tears pour unchecked from their eyes. For he played of the "Might have been"; and the spirit of God comes very near to all of us then—often too near for our peace of mind. But on those nights he would go home drunker than ever. . . .

I met Pete, that first night, and he gave me the introductions I wanted. From then on I was privileged: I was vouched for. And so it came about that often, when the conventional prosiness of London West bored one to extinction, the life of London East would stretch

forth a tempting hand. An old dark suit, a flannel collar, and the atmosphere of "nothing matters"! Lord! but it came back to me that night as I reported in triplicate on Acacia Avenue. . . .

It was at the age of twenty-seven that Pete took unto himself a wife; which, being interpreted, meaneth that he took unto himself a girl to live with permanently.

I remember the night he first met her—Kate, the girl I asked him about. The old musician had given us one of his rare outbursts, and the Beauty of the Ages was in the room. It just had us by the throat that thing he played, and Kate was at the table next to mine. She seemed utterly unconscious of any one as, with her lips parted and two great tears hanging on her eyelashes, she sat forward with her chin cupped in her hands. After a while she stirred restlessly, and her eyes came round to mine. The music was dying gently away, and her breast was rising and falling convulsively. . . .

"Gawd! but it makes yer see things," she whispered; "things as never was, things as never will be for us."

It was then I saw Pete, standing against the wall close by. He was looking at her, and in Lower Dock Alley one does not disguise one's feelings: camouflage is unknown. The girl saw him too, but for a moment the look blazing in Pete's face made no impression on her. Back with the might have beens she was still unconscious of his existence, and only when he sat down opposite her did she suddenly realise he was speaking to her.

"Dance with you?" she said slowly. "Ain't you Pete Jobson?"

"'Ow did yer know?" he demanded. "I ain't seen yer 'ere before."

"Wot's yer line?" she said after a moment, ignoring his question.

"Wot the bloody 'ell 'as that to do with you?" His jaw stuck out, and his clenched fist met the table with a bang.

The girl threw back her head and laughed, showing two rows of strong white teeth. "I likes yer when you're angry." She looked at him appraisingly. "I'll dance with yer once—Pete." The might have been had gone; life as it is had returned.

It would not have passed muster in some drawing-rooms—that dance; in others, feeble imitations of it may be seen nightly. In Lower Dock Alley there are no dress shirts to crumple or frocks to spoil, and you dance as the spirit moves you—and the girl. A dance means something there: it ceases to be a polite form of post-prandial exercise—it becomes an expression of life.

At the end of that dance she looked at Pete's face, she looked at his eyes, and once again did she laugh quite softly.

"Good-night, Pete Jobson," she said, and her voice was mocking. "Did yer like it?"

"Gawd! my gal," he muttered hoarsely, "but you can dance." And as he spoke she was gone.

He caught her at the door, and followed her out

into the darkness. Then he kissed her. She did not struggle, but lay in his arms—lifeless, inert.

“Wot’s the matter with yer?” he growled sullenly, as he let her go.

“This.” She stood in front of him, and he could see her eyes gleaming by the light of the street lamp. “The man wot kisses me like that I’ve got ter love; and I ’ates you. Take that, you——” Pete felt a stinging blow on the side of his head, and the next moment he was alone. For a while he stood rubbing his ear tentatively, and then with a peculiar look on his face he went inside again.

“See that girl I was dancing wiv just now?” he asked a pal. “Oo is she?”

“Old man Shearman’s daughter,” answered the other. “Lives down Box Street. But yer won’t get much change out of ’er, Pete.”

“’Ow the ’ell do you know?” demanded Jobson fiercely. “’Ave you been tryin’ any monkey tricks with ’er yerself?”

The other crook recoiled a pace. “Orl rite, orl rite, don’t get so ruddy ’uffy. I don’t know nothing abaht the girl ’cept wot I’ve ’eard.”

“Then you keep it at that, Joss Straker, or you an’ me’ll be ’aving words. An’ the man I catch monkeying with ’er—Gawd ’elp ’im.”

Thus did Pete enter the lists of the love makers. To a less sophisticated soul, the beginning might have left something to be desired, but Pete had made love before, and he argued that if in one meeting he could work the lady up sufficiently to say she hated him,

there was hope. At least, that is how he put it to me; and now Kate has two little Petes, so it is to be assumed he was right. . . .

This is not a story, and there is no plot. It is just a sketchy slice from a man's life, which may show that love of adventure and not inherent viciousness is at the bottom of the minds of many of our so-called criminals. Leaving aside the blackmailers, and one or two other branches of the fraternity of rogues, it is my contention that they are the victims of a system over which they have no control. And the viciousness of the system is frequently aggravated by those who, with the best intentions in the world, try to make it better. Sometimes, indeed, I have wondered whether they *are* actuated by the best intentions; or whether a peculiar form of selfishness and self-satisfaction is not the driving force.

On one occasion, I remember, I went down to see Kate. She asked me to come; at least, I ultimately deciphered her letter to mean something of the sort. Pete was undergoing a temporary retreat at His Majesty's expense, and things were a bit strained in the house. I arrived with some food in one pocket and a bottle of gin in the other, which, of course, was hopelessly reprehensible.

In the middle of our conversation, which turned largely on ways and means and was considerably helped by the gin, a lady arrived—a district visitor—and I dodged into the scullery. It was a most improving visit, I have no doubt; and it is possible that lady

went to bed that night with the virtuous glow of self-righteousness at fever heat. But as for Kate . . . well, it's the Kates who are supposed to benefit. . . .

She was a fine example—that district visitor—of what not to be. In the first place she was utterly ignorant of the practical conditions of life amongst those she visited; in the second place she sniffed—the self-satisfied sniff; in the third, she used the phrase, "My good girl." And the combination put the brass hat on. To be called a good girl is much the same as being alluded to as "a person." And people hate being called persons. To be informed that a young person has come and wishes to see one, is almost as infuriating as to be told by a frock-coated excrescence in a millinery emporium that "this young lady will attend to" one's wants. One can't ask a "young lady" for a bone collar stud; it's positively indecent. Heavens above! what's wrong with the words "man" and "woman"?

The district visitor spotted the gin just as she was going, and wanted to remove it. It was that which brought me from my seat in the scullery sink, and tied things up still more.

"It's my gin"—I removed the bottle from her hand—"entirely mine. If you want some yourself there is unlimited opportunity for you to obtain some, at comparatively small cost. Good morning, my good woman, good morning."

It struck me there was nothing like assuming the offensive spirit, and carrying the war into the enemy's camp. It would have been feeble for her to call me

her good man after that; so it was a case of "thumbs up," as far as we were concened. In fact, she was routed in disorder.

But it's all a long time ago, that life—in the pre-war dispensation. Things have changed now; let us pray the Powers of Common Sense that they will never revert. I like to think that perhaps I had something to do with the concrete fact of Pete in khaki—the mud plucker with the Military Medal hidden by the congealing filth.

It was the last time I saw them—just after the war began—that I quarrelled with Kate, and it was over that very thing—Pete in khaki—that the quarrel occurred.

It may have been the charm of my presence, it may have been the gin—and any way it is as well not to inquire too closely into matters of cause and effect—but the fact remains that these two lawless derelicts trusted me. When trouble was afoot I generally got to hear of it somehow, and we would foregather in the Dancing Hall of Lower Dock Alley.

She came straight to the point, did Kate, when I saw her. Pete had recently emerged from—however, he had just emerged—and was looking remarkably sheepish.

"This blarsted fool," announced his loving wife, before even the beer arrived, "wants to 'list."

"Good for you, Pete," I said, and he grinned feebly.

Then Kate spoke. She was not polite, and soon quite a crowd had gathered, and helped on the combat with suggestions.

"Look here, Kate," I said, when she stopped for breath, "have some beer."

"I don't want none of yer —— beer," she stormed, putting away a good half pint. "Wot I wants to know is why the 'ell 'e should go and fight for them ——, wot's done nothing but put him in clink? Where the 'ell do I come in?"

"Look here, Kate," I said quietly, "you just listen to me for a bit."

It wouldn't have passed muster on a public platform, the stuff I ladled out to them. A critical audience would have torn it to shreds, especially an audience whose God was money. But one thing rose clear, one thing was certain: that the love of country—that nameless love which is the greatest driving force which the world has ever known—was not absent from the so-called criminal classes. Eighty per cent. of my audience that night had done time; eighty per cent. were at war with law and order; and yet, Country—the Old Country—held them. Can the same be said of many of their more sanctimonious brethren? There was not a man there, at any rate, who would have pleaded conscience to escape his obligations, and at the same time would have been content to reap the benefits of other men's obligations. There was not a man there, at any rate, who would have bolted to the funk-hole of indispensability in a trade of which he was completely ignorant.

They had no consciences; they knew they were not indispensable; they knew they could do one thing

—fight!—and they've done it, damned well. They may be an unholy crowd, they may not conform to the strict paths of morality; but they have fought. They have sat and suffered in the Land of filth and Death for the benefit of many who regard them as pariahs and social lepers. But then, the "unco guid" are a very poisonous and nauseating crowd. The pity is that their voice is so big. . . .

They have found—these pariahs of ours—that authority need not, of necessity, be despotism. They have found that life can be lived without ceaseless war between them and their rulers; they have learned the Law of Give and Take—the great law which governs Humanity. For the first time they have left their filthy slums—their disgusting tenements—where, huddled together in revolting conditions, they were dragging out their drab and dreary lives.

"Oh, it isn't cheerful to see a man, the marvellous work of God,
Crushed in the mutilation mill, crushed to a smeary clod!"

So sings a soldier poet; and Heaven knows he is right. But it is worse—far worse—to think of those marvellous works of God—thousands of them; millions of them—crushed in the mutilation mill of disease and foulness; struggling, snarling, cursing, for a wretched pittance with which to buy forgetfulness for a short hour. Denied a bit of God's blue sky; denied the sight of God's green trees; sinking, slithering, writhing in the foetid pool of material degrada-

tion—they existed for a space and then they died. . . . And district visitors came and gave them tracts. . . .

They wanted no tracts for their souls; first of all they wanted clean, healthy surroundings for their bodies. It was up to us their leaders to see that they got them. And we failed. . . .

They have died—by the thousands—in France; and in dying surely they have found life. Let us look to it that those who return may also find the life they are entitled to, at home here. They have felt the Human Touch over the water—that touch which draws men very close together; that touch which smooths away the roughnesses, and helps to make the path so easy. Let us keep that Human Touch alive when we write Finis on the war.

VIII

And now—for I have wandered far afield—let us return to Shorty Bill. He was living amongst the rural delights of Passchendaele, when the catastrophe occurred. For weeks there had been peace and quiet; for weeks Shorty had wandered at odd times out into the darkness and desolation of No Man's Land, and, in due course, had returned. After some of these perigrinations there appeared a new nick on the handle of his own peculiar implement; more often the morning would find him sorrowfully shaking his head.

"Blank again, son." Thus would he greet en-

quiries. "Damned if I know where the perishers have gone to."

And then one morning peace ceased and throughout the salient there rained down a storm of shells big and small—gas and otherwise. It became like old times again, and every one began to sit up and take notice. Was this the much-talked-of German offensive, or was it merely the effect of the coming spring—an ebullition of joy, a friendly greeting. Zonnebeeke was plastered, Polygon Wood got back to its old form: the poor old Cloth Hall gathered in a few more for luck, while even Poperinghe took upon itself once again past glories in the shell line.

And then the news began to come through; the news which took men different ways. Some grew thoughtful—some cursed; some laughed and said it was just a flash in the pan, while others remarked that the flash seemed more in the nature of a young explosion. To each and every one according to the manner of the brute, the German break-through at St. Quentin, came differently. Not a man but had fought over the ground; not a man but knew the Somme battlefield, and the evacuated area, or some little bit of it as well as he knew his own back garden. And it was so deuced hard to understand—that was the devil of it. That it would all come right, no one—save the faint heart—doubted; but what had happened; why had it occurred?

"Coming on in masses, son," remarked Shorty one night to Mayhew, "coming on in masses, and we not there to kill them. Did you see that officer who

said he'd fired three hundred rounds and killed three hundred Boches?" Shorty spat reflectively. "Not that I call that amusing gun work myself: it's merely a duty—though a damned pleasant duty." He relapsed into silence, running his thumb-nail up and down the notches on the stock of his rifle, and frowning thoughtfully.

"What I can't get at is why they've come back so far." Mayhew shifted his position in the corner of the dugout, and stared out of the door. "It's bad, Shorty, rotten bad. If one man can kill three hundred Boches. . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, and for a while there was silence.

"We wasn't there, mate; so we oughtn't to say nothing." Shorty spoke with slow deliberation. "It may be that when they've spent 'emselves, that French bloke will clip 'em one in the wind from the south, and cut 'em off; then again it may not."

"You must have written as military correspondent for the Press, Shorty," murmured Mayhew with mild sarcasm.

"But whether he does or whether he doesn't," Shorty ignored the interruption, "I'll bet one thing, I'd even stake this on it." With due solemnity he lifted the weapon. "I don't give a dam for the Boche numbers, though that may have had something to do with it; and cut the cackle about morning mists and such like. The root of the trouble was that the boys have forgotten their best friend, and how to use him." He held his rifle in front of him and looked at it lovingly. "That, and a new situation—now,

we've no trenches. Just man to man." His eyes glistened, and his great gnarled fist shook slightly at the picture in his mind.

"And rumour, Shorty," Mayhew broke in quietly. "Boche agents telling men they were up in the air; telling parties to retire. Wind vertical everywhere; wind blowing like a hurricane. A machine gun poked through, and letting drive into somebody's back."

"Who let it through?" demanded his companion fiercely. "After all these years—after all these years." He seemed to be following a train of thought of his own, and for a long while he stared silently at the brazier in the corner. "Maybe we'll be down there soon ourselves, son." The advent of the mail brought him out of his reserve. Since his one letter from Rose he had never been known to get another, but he always became hopeful when the postman arrived. As usual he drew blank and returned to the contemplation of the glowing charcoal. And it was only half consciously that Mayhew—engrossed in a letter from his wife—heard his murmured words. "Comin' back! Retreatin'! God! but it's a dam tough billet to chew!"

Now in the ordinary course of events, when a Division pulls out of the line after a prolonged spell of trench work it rests. It goes to a country where all is peace, and there it drills and trains, and generally refits itself for further adventures in the line.

By day the Divisional Band will play in sleepy village market-places; in the evenings the Divisional Concert party will give a show in a crowded barn. To be exact Shorty's battalion had been out two days when the bomb shell arrived. The men had all had a bath; the Pimples had given their celebrated performance, amidst vast applause, in an odiferous barn; a performance at which the General had arrived unexpectedly and informally to every one's delight—being that manner of man; and had left with his A.D.C. through a hole in the wall in order not to disturb things. As yet the change which had come had not made itself felt; the Battalion was resting—as usual, it would rest.

But at the moment the Hun—though undoubtedly paying the piper—was also undoubtedly calling the tune. And the Hun decided otherwise. Hence the bomb shell.

“The Battalion will be ready to move by tactical train at half-an-hour's notice.” The Adjutant looked up from the pink slip of paper in his hand, and beamed gently on the mess. “There you are, boys; isn't it nice? James—I'm surprised at you.” He regarded the Signal officer coldly. “For what other reason do you draw ten shillings a day—one hundred and eighty pounds a year—plus field allowance, but to move by tactical train at half-an-hour's notice? For Heaven's sake remember those gallant fellows at home, who have been stirred to a patriotic frenzy by the onslaught of the hated Hun, and actually have to pay five bob in the pound income tax.”

A recently arrived copy of the *Tatler* at that moment struck him forcibly in the head, and silence resigned, broken only by occasional expletives indicative, doubtless, of intense joy.

"I'll bet that means we move to-night." The doctor blew forcibly through his pipe without success. "And I had arranged to dine with the Ambulance. Mac has some pre-war whiskey. Damn!" And once again silence reigned, while people digested this great thought.

An orderly came into the room and handed an envelope to the Adjutant. Six pairs of eyes watched him anxiously as he read the message; six hollow groans announced that his face was not of the type which makes poker a paying game for its owner.

"We move at 23.40," he remarked tersely, "or in civilised lingo—midnight less twenty minutes."

"Which means we may get away by three—with luck." The Assistant Adjutant spoke from bitter experience. "Is it end loading or side loading?"

"Transport except cookers and water-carts by road," answered the other. "My dear man, we're going into the battle. Could you ask for anything better? The Amalgamated Society of Slushton oyster catchers have already told you officially that they are lost in admiration of your prowess, and are with you in spirit, if not in fact. Doesn't that help?"

"Talking of spirits," murmured the doctor, "reminds me." He rose and opened the door. "Simp-

son," his voice could be heard outside, "Simpson—my flask. See that it is filled. . . ."

Doctors are base materialists. . . .

Every night, somewhere in France, a regiment moves by tactical train. It is as sure a thing as that every moment some one is born into the world, and some one departs out of it. But no amount of custom can ever make the performance anything but utterly vile. At twenty-forty that night there passed through the one street of the little village where the entraining was to take place, the first consignment of the victims. At its head rode the transport officer, and the consignment itself consisted of that portion of the battalion transport which was to go by rail. In the station yard a seething mass of mules and wagons belonging to other units of the Division, fowled one another with unceasing regularity. Occasionally one would detach itself, and ram the office of the R.T.O., a wooden and unstable structure: occasionally a bellow of pain from the centre of the cortège would proclaim that a cooker had passed over the foot of one of the loading party. And through it all, that member of the "Q" staff responsible for this dreadful thing, cursed fluently and as to the manner born. For the whole night it would be his lot to see that ceaseless stream sort itself out, pass out of the darkness into the garish light of the acetylene flares, and be seized bit by bit for the loading party to do its worst. At crucial moments the

flares would go out, and a heavy crash would denote that a cooker was jibbing, undeterred by entreaties from its attendants; at other and still more crucial moments some humourist in another part of the country would loose off a magazine of ammunition at a noise in the sky—reputed to be a Boche aeroplane—which left the noise unmoved but descended like a hailstorm on the merry gathering at the station. And through it all ran the ceaseless undercurrent of rumour, as officers crowded up, paused for a moment in the entrance outside the ticket office of that once sleepy country station, and then passed on into the night to look for their own particular train.

Stand by the door for a minute or two in the darkness and listen to the unknown voices close by; hear the snatches of conversation as little groups form and reform; detach yourself for a moment from the bustle and noise, the grunting trucks, the wheels of the transport bumping over the cobbles;—and view it not as a part of war, but as another of the idiotic performances in which we indulge these days. Then you'll get the humour—and since it's at least three hours before your train goes, it's better to laugh quietly and peacefully in a dark corner, than to run round in small circles outside pretending to help and getting knocked down by other people's transport. After all, in the fullness of time everything will doubtless happen somehow; and is there not always the harassed performer from "Q" who will be hanged if it doesn't. . . .

"I tell you we've got back the Messines Ridge—the A.S.C. sergeant-major's batman got it off the ice from one of the cooks at Div. Headquarters."

"But, my dear fellow, our orderly-room clerk. . . ." Exeunt arguing.

"Do what you like with it, burn it, bury it—but don't worry me. If you can get the dam thing out of the ditch, and it hasn't broken both axles, and you can get it loaded on to the train—it can go. I can't help it if the lorry driver was tight; he says the merchant on your mules tried to passage over the bonnet." Exit aggrieved one morosely. "The first train *may* go in an hour. It will then be four hours late. If your blanket lorry is bogged four miles away the situation is not without its gloomy side. Have I got any men to help you? Great Heavens! look outside. I've fifty—all of them asleep or trampled to death, and there's four miles of transport still on the road. My God! what a life!" The representative of Q falls on the neck of the R.T.O. and bursts into choking sobs.

"Did you ever meet her? Nice little thing—snub nose, and freckles on her neck?"

"You don't mean the girl Ginger took to Murray's, do you?"

"That's the one. My dear old thing, you can take it from me, that that girl . . ." A series of heavy crashes outside, as an engine backs with extreme velocity on to several trucks and proceeds to chase

them down the line, drowns the remainder of this promising tit-bit.

And so the great game jogs on; the moving of the pawns to their appointed place, where Death the insatiable Master of War is waiting, is not without its lighter side. To-morrow who knows? Even to-night, in the train itself, the finish may come for some of that slowly-moving crowd outside. But just at the moment—there is humour, there is life, there is something of the right sort inside the water-bottle. To-morrow—who cares? Who dares to care? . . .

Slowly the long train pulled out of the station. The closed trucks with their well-known markings "*Chevaux 8. Hommes 40*" each contained eight horses more or less, and forty men generally more than less. One real railway carriage labelled as first-class by some deep humourist creaked protestingly along in the centre of the train containing the officers in that acute condition of discomfort which is the peculiar property of a carriage designed to hold three a side and compelled to hold five. An attack of cramp on the part of the Assistant Adjutant spread further gloom and despondency in his compartment, which was not lessened by the sudden descent of the Medical Officer's equipment complete with water bottle—less cork—on the C.O.'s head. At intervals the train stopped, and an unpleasant soldier inserted his head and a draught, with demands to see bundles of papers presented to the Adjutant prior to departure by the

R.T.O. Without these official recognitions of the train's existence a catastrophe would inevitably occur. They contain in triplicate the train's destination, and it would be a dreadful thing to go to the wrong battle.

In front huddled together in the closed wagons the men dozed fitfully; and the long line of open trucks with wagons and cookers lashed down, completed the train. Through the beginning of the grey, misty dawn, it grunted and jolted on its way: through great heaps of slag, through the brown, deserted fields—going into the unknown—going to the to-morrow. Shorty Bill shook himself and pulled his blanket closer round him.

"Awake, son." He looked at a man sitting hunched beside him, and proceeded to fill his pipe. "I reckons we've for it pretty soon now. I'll be getting to my three figures."

The man raised his head, and in the dim light Shorty saw him grin. He saw the white flash of his teeth, the white blur of his face, and then he saw it change. What was white became red and dreadful; a great stream of something seemed to cover the white flesh with a mask. It writhed convulsively and then sogged forward lolling from side to side. . . . And even as he gazed at this sudden nightmare, with a roar something passed overhead, drowning the rumble of the train. A crackling, spitting noise sounded for a moment, and then died away again; only the train jolting on its way broke the silence.

"Gawd!—son—what the hell . . .?" Shorty leaned forward and touched the lolling figure, and his hand

when he took it away was wet. The man was dead.

And now from all along the train, that same crackling, spitting noise could be heard. Men rubbing the sleep from their eyes, were sitting up and asking one another foolishly—with the dazed foolishness of men just awakened—what was happening. The sliding doors of trucks were wrenched open; groups of men clustered to the openings and peered out into the white ground mist through which the faint blue of the sky could just be seen. Then it came again.

Faintly at first, then growing rapidly in volume, they heard the droning roar. It seemed to envelop them and the vicious crackle of the Lewis guns sounded puny in comparison. It passed over their heads; they could see the spread of its wings—could see the silhouette of the German behind his gun; and then once again it had gone—this time for good. . . .

Thus is it in the Great Game. One never knows; from minute to minute one never knows. Two hours later a certain German airman, having eaten a comfortable breakfast, and reported his attack on the troop train, prepared to turn into bed. And two hours later from that same troop train which had completed its journey, they pulled out a sergeant with a shattered arm, a dead mule, and what was left of an erstwhile stockbroker's clerk.

"I reckon we've got off damned easy," said a company sergeant-major, to no one in particular. "But it don't seem fair somehow—not that sort o' thing. Don't give a feller a chance."

Standing by his dead friend, Shorty Bill heard,

and his jaw was set. "I'm thinking you're right, Major," he said slowly. "It ain't quite fair." He turned away, thoughtfully feeling the edge of his own peculiar weapon. And he was still thoughtful when half-an-hour later the battalion moved off along the wide *pavé* road to the east.

Down towards the station came the long stream of shambling figures. Dressed in their best black clothes—some on lorries, some in carts, but most of them on foot, the refugees left the houses and farms which had been their world ever since they could remember. It had seemed impossible that anything could ever happen to them. Every day they had heard the rumble of the guns miles away; every night they had watched—till the sight grew stale—the dancing flashes on the horizon. Troops out at rest had been billeted on them; the parlour complete with the image of Elijah under a glass dome and photograph enlargements of the entire family had been used as an officers' mess. True—there was a war on; but it was away—up the road. It was just a question of time before everything was over; and in the meantime the English were very easy-going. Moreover they paid well. . . .

And then it had come. Suddenly without warning the troops in the barn and the officers in the parlour had left them. They went in the middle of the night—without confusion, but so unexpectedly. Had not *Monsieur le Capitaine* been bargaining the previous afternoon for the purchase of a pig—one of the latest

arrivals of a stout and elderly but much-respected member of their *ménage*. He had taken a fancy to a nice little lady with two black marks on her otherwise pink back; he said that somehow the piglet reminded him of his only aunt, and had christened her Tabitha. But he was droll, was he not—*Monsieur le Capitaine*.

And now he had gone—suddenly in the middle of the night. The farm was empty—save for a heap of stores and baggage on which two soldiers were sitting. Tabitha—little thinking of her narrow escape—grunted in piggy unison with her brothers and sisters, exploring new-corners in her world of straw and refuse; the cows were being milked, the hens were scratching away as usual, and Margot—the eldest daughter—was stumping round in her wooden sabots looking for eggs. Eggs fetched good money these days. The English with their barbarous ideas of breakfast were fond of eggs, and although the soldiers who had been there overnight had gone—others would come. It always had been so—it always would be so. *C'est la guerre. . . .*

The guns were very silent that morning it seemed; and there were a lot of soldiers on the road. Not so much transport as usual somehow; more ambulances perhaps. . . . It did seem a little different, but there was the farm work to do—the image of Elijah to dust. . . . Margot heard it first in her pursuit of an errant duck, and she stopped and looked upwards in surprise. Who-e-e-e . . . phut. Like a big mosquito something passed over her head, and

with a metallic clatter, one of the tiles on the roof broke in two and fell on to the bricks below.

Madame popped her head out of the door; monsieur spat reflectively. One of the soldiers on the dump of stores woke up and scratched his head, while Margot continued the duck hunt. *C'est la guerre*; and just at first the fact that a rifle bullet had hit the farm carried no significance.

It was an hour later that five or six in succession, like a flight of bees passed clean over the house; while faint—very faint—from over the road away in the marshy field where the kingcups grew, there came a tapping noise. But the soldiers slept and the duck was caught, and Elijah was dusted. So what did a German machine gun in the field of Monsieur le Maire matter? . . .

The road grew more deserted of vehicles—more full of soldiers. A few men were coming across the open from the little copse two kilometres away; some shrapnel white and fleecy burst high up, and a nosecap whistled down, burying itself in close proximity to Tabitha. Casually, indifferently, Madame watched the men who came across the open. They staggered a little as they walked, swaying from side to side. They moved mechanically, stumbling every now and then, and as they passed she saw that their faces were drawn and grey.

A sergeant stopped and spoke to the two men on the baggage, who woke up, and again scratched their heads thoughtfully. Then he went on, leaving the

baggage guard arguing. After a while they rose and came over to her.

“‘Op it,” remarked the spokesman. “Boches. Napoo.” With his finger he indicated the village up the road. “No blinking earthly yer stopping ‘ere, madame,” he continued. “Boches. Over there.” He waved a comprehensive arm. Them fellows all that was left; the blinking regiment—napoo.”

Madame, skilled in the vernacular through three years’ experience, felt something grow cold within her. She understood the gist of what he had said, and after all these years—surely *le bon Dieu* would not permit it. It was inconceivable. The farm, so sleepy and quiet in the drowsy afternoon had been her husband’s, and her husband’s father’s before him. It was successful, prosperous; it was their all, their home. And now to go and leave it; to go out into the unknown with nothing more than they could carry! Ah! it was too cruel.

Once again the tapping came faintly through the still air, while two ambulances drove furiously down the road. Of course they would only be going for a short while; they would be able to return after the Boches had been driven back, and the farm would not be much damaged. A shell hole here and there perhaps; a few tiles off the roof—and they could probably take some of their stock with them. There were none of the usual signs of battle; no guns, no noise—nothing save that occasional tapping, and the road in front—the road along which the lorries had bumped in an

endless stream for two years, and which now lay ominously quiet under the hot afternoon sun.

A solitary lorry came lurching up the track that led to the farm and pulled up outside the gates. The driver and his mate shouted to the two soldiers, and getting down from their seats began to help them load the baggage and stores. The men worked casually and without hurry, and Madame consoled herself with watching them. Things could not be so urgent after all; there was no immediate danger—otherwise surely they would have hurried? But it takes a little more than two years' experience before safe deductions can be placed on the way Tommy works.

The last roll of blankets disappeared into the lorry, and the four world's workers sat down and discoursed a while. Then they approached her and the old time question was asked. "*Bière, madame?*"

Surely all must be well, thought Madame. *Bière*—why yes; good *bière* in bottles—as always. Was she not famed far and wide for her beer—and its price. Margot materialised from dark doings in the kitchen; beer materialised with her. And the heart of Madame was made light again.

The soldiers drank as they had worked—without undue bustle. Then the spokesman of the party addressed Madame, while Margot politely listened. For two years Madame and Margot had comprehended one word in every ten which had been spoken to them, and they had always been polite. Hence their trade and reputation as beer sellers. And that afternoon they again understood—just enough.

Enough to make Margot gaze round-eyed at the soldier as he spoke; enough to bring back Madame's secret fears one-hundred-fold. For he was suggesting that she and her husband and Margot and what little they could carry should forthwith stow themselves on the lorry and go. Moreover *toute de suite* and the touter the suiter.

But it was impossible. She waxed voluble; Monsieur, who had entered during the conversation, spat in confirmation; Margot nodded her head. Her *belles vaches*; *les cochons*; little Tabitha and the hens; the soldiers would see it was impossible.

"Napoo, 'Erb," murmured one of them to the conversationalist. "The old geyser's taken root. Let's 'ave another beer and get a move on."

Another beer in due course disappeared, and the two soldiers climbed up beside the driver. Once again the lorry lurched over the rough farm track and turned towards the little village. It was then that it struck Madame that for the first time for two whole years, the farm was absolutely empty save for the owners. . . .

The sun was glinting through the tops of the poplars that lined the main road when the battalion appeared. It had marched many miles since detraining that morning, and it was at full strength—save only for a sergeant with a shattered arm who had been evacuated, and a stockbroker's clerk who had been buried. The sight of them brought back confidence to Madame; it was what she had grown to expect—it was normal. Only little Margot standing by the

gate as the C.O. rode in with his Adjutant, noticed that one of the companies did not leave the main road with the others, but remained—spread out along the ditch beside it, while small bodies of men pushed out across the open on the other side towards the kingcup field from which had come the tapping noise.

“These people must be cleared out, Carruthers,” said the C.O. as he dismounted. “We can’t leave ‘em here.”

“It will take more than us to move ‘em, sir,” returned the Adjutant with the wisdom born of experience.

Madame was charming. She indicated the room of honour—graced with Elijah—which had always served as the mess. She stated that there was beer and *œufs*—all in fact that the heart of man could desire. And as she spoke, there was a droning roar, a heavy explosion, and every window in the house was smashed. Dazedly she turned, wondering what had happened. In one corner of the yard hung a red cloud of brickdust and fumes, and sprawling around it lay the remnants. An arm—torn off—had been flung nearly at her feet; a head was rolling. . . . But why harrow? why enlarge? Madame had looked on war for the first time, and its suddenness had stupefied her. Only Monsieur still spat contemplatively. . . .

“Get the men scattered, Carruthers.” The C.O.’s voice cut in quietly. “Move.” And in two minutes not a man remained in the yard.

“*Il faut que vous partez, Madame.*” The Colonel

in his early youth had passed an examination in French irregular verbs; as a conversationalist he did not excel. "Nous—nous—what the hell is the French for fight—*nous combattons les Boches ici toute de suite.*"

A dry sob shook Madame, and she put a protecting arm round Margot who clung close to her skirts. The Boches—here—on her farm! And there was no one to whom she could turn for assistance. . . .

In the mess room the C.O., poring over a map, was already dictating orders to his Adjutant. He had told her all he could, and now she was forgotten in bigger issues. It was *her* house, but . . .

Two hours later she turned at the entrance to the little village and looked back. A line of men stretched away to the farm digging hard, and the long shadows of the poplars had already reached the gates. For a moment she stood there—she, and her husband and little Margot. She could see the cows peacefully grazing—even the pink form of Tabitha's stout mother. Bathed in the golden glory of the setting sun the home of a lifetime bade her farewell; and then, even as she watched, the glory died. A cloud had drifted over the sun, and the house was chill and dark. It was the end—and in that moment she realised it.

Slowly, falteringly, as one grown old of a sudden, she walked on into the village, without looking back. And with her was Margot clinging to her hand, and Monsieur still spitting apathetically. *C'est la guerre.*

.

To Shorty Bill the tactical situation was unknown. All that concerned him was that as dusk fell he found himself with his platoon at a cross-roads about a mile from the farm taken over by his battalion headquarters. The platoon was picketing the roads and nothing else was certain. As far as they knew there were troops in front of them—but then they didn't know very far. Nor did any one else. Only two days before had a certain brigade—or what was left of them—woken up in the morning to find two German battalions with massed bands marching in column of route along a road half-a-mile behind them. And for a few wonderful seconds the Lewis gunners—or what was left of them—had lived. But it tends to show that the situation contained the element of doubt.

Moreover there were no trenches, and the men were accustomed to trenches. In the past absence of trenches had meant back areas and peace, and custom is hard to shake. Cattle were wandering about over the fields in front of them, and the only sign of war was a town away in the distance burning fiercely.

Then suddenly there came the old familiar toc-toc-toc; the old familiar swish of bullets, and the platoon took cover in a ditch. A machine gun had opened fire on them, concealed somewhere in that quiet countryside—behind some hedge perhaps, or hidden in one of the barns in front. And to Shorty there came the sudden realisation of the new war. . . .

With his head raised above the ditch he searched the ground in front with eyes keen as a hawk's. A

thrill of anticipation ran through him. No more trenches—no more crawling round saps in No Man's Land—but the open country and the game his soul loved at the end.

"There he is, son," he murmured half to himself half to his section commander alongside. For five minutes he had been gazing motionless into the dusk. "By that stunted willow, at the meeting of them two hedges. Give me the gun, boy—give me the gun. I'd like to leave him till to-night—but maybe there'll be some more. Put the sights to four-fifty."

He didn't fire quickly—not the first shot; but then there came three and it was almost as if a Lewis gun had fired. The platoon sergeant who had been told that Shorty was on the war-path was crouching behind him with field-glasses to his eyes. So he saw—almost as well as Shorty. Something dark lurched into the hedge and half fell through an opening where it lay still; another dark thing rose suddenly and spun round, only to start crawling away towards a little copse behind.

"Quick, Shorty, quick." Even as the sergeant spoke the rifle beside him fired again, and the second dark thing ceased to crawl.

"Some blokes would have said it was napoo," remarked Shorty as he produced his knife. "Said they was out o' bombing distance. Damn all bombs." With which cryptic utterance he added two notches to the existing line, and sloped away towards a farm close by. There were cows there, and fresh milk is

preferable to the tinned brand. Half-an-hour later darkness had fallen, and the platoon was relieved. . . .

It was perhaps because the Hun was getting to the end of his tether for the moment that the situation did not develop more quickly. It was perhaps because of that also, that Shorty Bill never got one of those targets of which he had read, when, firing again and again till the rifle burned his hand, a man could not miss.

Somehow I am glad. Any one can do that—it requires no art. And though it might have doubled and even trebled his score, it would have lowered his standard. With Shorty every bird was a high one; every nick represented art—and art in its highest form to the performer. Many of those nicks on his rifle represented days of ceaseless toil and preparation; long burning hours, when, disguised and motionless he had lain surrounded by flies exposed to rum jars, to get his quarry. Often other targets had exposed themselves during the time he waited—but they never drew him. He had his own methods: he was out after one particular sniper—not after anything that happened to come along. Other nicks on his rifle represented moments when his wonderful eye had spotted what no one else could see, and some unwary Hun, exposing himself for a fleeting moment, had preceded the machine gunners by the hedge into oblivion.

And on his own peculiar weapon the nicks represented an even higher art. Each one had a history

—and some day maybe, those histories will be written. But in each case it had been man to man; in each case something had happened suddenly in the darkness of a sap, or a patrol near the wire in No Man's Land, with the flares lobbing up on each side. And a Boche would be found with his throat cut by the man behind, while away in front the rank grass rustled for a moment, and then was still. Moreover that was the time of danger for the second Boche. It is unwise to pay too much attention to the dead, when the grass has rustled close by. And so I am glad that he never bastardised his art, and that the last three nicks put a crown on his work. For with them he topped the century, and John Mayhew, who was with him at the time, still speaks in wonder of that final score. John has his knife—but he doesn't use it. He couldn't if he wanted to as a matter of fact; it was an artist's weapon, and Jim considers that mathematics are still his strong point. But some day, if he survives, he may tell his children of some of the nicks on the handle of the strange knife that hangs in the hall. . . .

And in those far distant days when youth has come back to the world; when children are children, and laughter is heard once again; when women no longer start and tremble at the sight of a telegraph boy, and their men sit down by the fireside at night with peace in their hearts; when the whine of the shell and the drone of the bombing aeroplane come like a nightmare from the past; then and then only will such stories attain their true perspective. To the children they will

be fairy tales even as Jack and the Beanstalk; to the others they will seem then as fairy tales too—the tales of the Great Madness that came upon the world. And when the woman goes upstairs that night in her heart there will be a great thankfulness. From the depths of her being there will well up a full “Thank God; *he* was spared.” And he—what of him? Back on the wings of time for a moment he will stare into the fire, his pipe unheeded in his hand. At times his eyes will glint, his muscles tauten; he will hear again that German breathing in the dark near by; he will gallop once again through that barrage; he will see the old Ypres—Poperinghe road, the double crassier at Loos, the village that once was Guillemont. He will see—those others, those others who paid the great penalty. And so will the glint die away, the muscles relax. Just a small night-cap; just one toast—a silent toast, to those he left behind across the water. The guns are silent; the peasants are back in the land where once it was death to stand upright. Occasionally as they go about their work they find traces of old underground holes, where timbers rot and rats swarm; near by are the remnants of trenches—grass-grown and crumbling. And the peasants shrug their shoulders and slouch on. It is all over; it is as if it never had been to those who were not in it. Only the graves remain in the military cemeteries; and those others who were buried where they fell. In the train as you run past Hooge, having got your luncheon basket at Ypres, you may see them—each with their little wooden cross just showing above the

long rank grass. They are all there—scattered and perhaps lost—the graves of that great triumphant army: in the woodland, and in the meadow, in the dykes and on the hills.

And sometimes at night you may see them. The moon will be shining through the long straight poplars, and the estaminets will be full. Then they will come out—that great band of sportsmen and blackguards, of saints and sinners, and will throng again through the woods where the trees are still but jagged stumps; will cluster again at the crossroads where once things happened. Maybe the farmer walking home late will feel them around him, and will quicken his steps. He will turn into his gate, and with a shiver will bolt and bar the door—though the night be warm. And if he had eyes to see and peered through his kitchen window he would see a shadowy figure crouching in the road behind a dim barrier; if he had ears to hear he would catch the swish of bullets up the road. In the long ago there was a machine gun there and sometimes the gunner who fired it goes through the performance again with those he killed—and they all laugh. It was so mad—so utterly foolish: and the trees creak with the humour of it when there is no wind.

The materialist—slightly fuddled on *vin blanc*—and just ejected from the Coq de Paille, thinks the breeze means rain on the morrow. But there is no rain: it is just the laughter of those who paid the price, which goes whispering onwards to the ends of the earth. . . .

Just a few will hear it and—understand. *Et pour les autres*—what does it matter? They are still too busy grabbing in the garbage for money: with all the same old petty vices and hypocrisies—all the same old political messes and snobbery. Nothing has altered: everything is just the same as ever. . . .

Only the laughter is sad—sad and a little cynical. . . . No heel taps in that silent toast—good and bad, priest and waster they gave all they had, and no man may do more. . . .

The next morning dawned cold and misty. The faint blue above gave the promise of another cloudless day, but John sitting in the hole he had dug for himself during the night shivered as the damp struck home. Next to him Shorty Bill was looking sombrely across the deserted main road close by them.

"I've gotta sort o' feelin', son," he remarked slowly after a while, "like I ain't never had before. Say—do you believe in seeing ahead like—I don't rightly know the word."

"Presentiment?" Mayhew looked up sharply. "I don't. Chuck it, Shorty."

But Shorty seemed not to hear. "Do you see the little wisps of fog circling round them hop-poles? Do you see how it lies in that bit of a dip there? It's queer, boy, that there mist. An' this village here just sort o' clothed in it somehow. All dead and cold—and a few days ago it was alive and warm, and folks was having their drop of beer in those very houses. I guess I don't like that there mist."

"You used to like it, Shorty, way up in Passchendaele," answered Mayhew; "said it helped you."

"I reckon it was different, son." Shorty produced his pipe, and filled it carefully. "It was dead there—the land was dead; the mist seemed to fit in like. Here it ought to be alive—and it isn't. I guess it's kind o' dead—that there little village—but it ain't buried yet. Maybe we'll be seeing the burial service this mornin'." Shorty puffed at his pipe and relapsed into silence.

Away in front the ground began to show up as the mist lifted, and suddenly Mayhew was roused out of his uneasy dose by the sound of voices above him. Standing outside the trench were the C.O. and his Adjutant, talking to the Company Commander.

"I'm told," said the C.O., "that we're covered, but I'm damned if I know. A patrol from D Company was out last night and didn't meet a soul—ours or theirs."

"It seems pretty quiet, sir, at present." The Adjutant was looking through his field-glasses.

"It's this bally village I don't like." The Company Commander seemed uneasy. "I've got a strong detachment the other side, and it's in touch with the Rutlands. But I hate villages in the line." The three officers passed on in the direction of Battalion Headquarters and Shorty grinned.

"I reckons we're in for a ragtime sort of stunt, son," he remarked cheerfully. "Sargent, I guess I might see somethin' from that house over there to clear the

air a bit. I'm thinking I'll go across and have a look."

"Right oh! Shorty." The platoon sergeant stopped as he passed. "Don't go and lose yerself. Better take Mayhew with you so as you can send back a message. Not as you're likely to. I reckons Jerry ain't troubling us to-day."

The house in question was on the outskirts of the village, and commanded a view of the little dip which had caught Shorty's eye earlier in the morning. The door leaned drunkenly outwards, and, across the broken windows, a network of telegraph wires, cut down by shell fire, lay twisted in confusion.

Kind of dead—but not buried yet—John Mayhew, as he peered into the front room, recalled Shorty Bill's words. A great hole gaped in the mud wall, showing the kitchen on the other side; and yet another great hole beyond showed a glimpse of the garden beyond. Over everything lay a thick red coating of brick dust, which covered the window-sill and the chairs, and a heap of old clothes that was lying on the table. Some plates and cups had been heaped in one corner, and through the door of the room the stairs splintered and broken could be seen with the banisters still standing.

"Not quite dead," said John thoughtfully, "not quite dead somehow. It's been lived in too recently." And even as he spoke with a shrill squawk a hen flew out into the garden from the kitchen. . . .

Mayhew lifted his leg to clamber into the room. A cloud of stifling dust followed him as he moved

across the floor into the kitchen, where another hen clucking angrily appeared to resent his presence. A stout terror with an abnormally long and curly tail sidled in from the garden and regarded him pensively; khaki was familiar to her and in the past had generally meant food. And just recently food had not been forthcoming; there appeared to have been an upheaval in the dog world of the village.

“Got a bit of biscuit, Shorty?” Mayhew turned to speak to his companion and the words died away in his mouth. For Shorty was standing in the little hall and his eyes were fixed on the staircase. Moreover there was the glint in them which Jim knew of old.

“Not quite dead, I reckons, son.” Shorty still peering at the stairs came slowly towards him, and Jim saw him slip the safety catch of his rifle forward. “And that’s a rum-looking dog I guess, but go and look at them stairs, boy.” With unnecessary noise he dislodged a tin. “I’m thinking we’ve struck a dud in this house. Well, dawg, d’you understand English.” He looked straight at Mayhew. “You never knows who understands English in this blinking country.”

“What the devil is it, Shorty?” muttered Jim.

Shorty’s eyes were still fixed on the stairs. “Move about, son,” he said, softly. “Whistle—make a noise. There are footprints in the dust on them stairs. They goes up—but they don’t come down. Now why should people go upstairs and not come down again—and who are they anyway?”

The stout terrier still sat on the floor pensively regarding them; the hens still scratched about in the garden outside; everything seemed just as it had been—except that the hair at the base of Mayhew's scalp was pricking strangely. For if there was anybody up there who could it be but . . . And at that moment something fell on the floor of the room above.

"Watch it, boy," said Shorty with a fleeting grin, "watch the top of the stairs. What did I tell you this mornin' about that there presentiment of mine?" Swiftly and methodically he was stripping off his equipment. "I'll be wanting you just to cover my advance with a bit of noise. Sing a song, Jim. What's that one about the feller meetin' his last love that bloke in the 'Shrapnels' used to sing? Catchy little toon that. And if the dawg joins in, so much the better."

"Who are up there, Shorty?" Mayhew's voice was shaking with excitement.

"That's what I'm wanting to see." With his rifle at the ready, and his Kukri-bill hook slung on his belt, Shorty crept towards the stairs. "Sing, you perisher, sing."

To the lover of the conventional it must have been a strange sight. In the kitchen a teacher of pure mathematics raised his extremely unmelodious voice in a song to which London listened nightly, while he watched Shorty cautiously feeling his way up the rickety stairs. Every now and then loud cracks occurred, and the singer's voice rose in a discordant bray to cover the incident.

It was farce—roaring farce; then in a second it

was tragedy. Mayhew saw it first—just at the top of the stairs; then Shorty saw it—and paused. Just a little eddy of red brick dust and there was no wind. It came from the passage above, and dust does not get up unless it is disturbed.

The song continued though the singer's voice seemed curiously muffled. But then, when a man's cheek is up against the stock of his gun he cannot perform in opera, and Mayhew saw instinctively that this first one would be his shot. Away from the foot of the stairs as he was, he must see the cause of the dust eddy before Shorty who was halfway up them.

Something was rising—something outlined against the dim light upstairs—something round. Resting his gun against the door he waited, while Shorty—with a quick look round—took in the situation and crouched against the banisters. Very slowly it rose—that round object which seemed about the size of a pumpkin, while the song still maundered on. And then the singer stopped. There was a moment's silence, and the crack of a rifle echoed through the house.

With one bound Shorty was up the stairs, and a second shot rang out followed by a stabbing grunt as he lunged with his bayonet. The dust was rising in choking clouds as Mayhew reached the landing, and he tripped heavily over the body lying at the top of the stairs. It was the Hun he had killed, and his head was split like a rotten melon. With a curse he picked himself up and dashed into the little front room.

By the window stood a machine gun ready mounted,

with a German, whose body still heaved, lying near the tripod. In one corner another Hun was trying feebly to pull the bayonet out of his body with Shorty's rifle still attached to it. He had crashed down with the awful force of the blow, and he lay as he fell cursing. But Mayhew had no eyes for him or the hatred on his face; he was gazing at the other two figures.

Swaying backwards and forwards were Shorty and a Boche non-commissioned officer. He was a huge man—the Boche—and his condition was good. Neither of them seemed to notice the spectator; they fought silently with hatred in their eyes—those two who had no personal quarrel. Ten times over could Mayhew have shot the Hun, but each time he paused—for he knew Shorty would never have forgiven him.

And now their breathing was coming fast, as locked together they stood almost motionless. Each was putting forward his maximum effort to bring his weapon into use. If only the Hun could bring his right arm with the revolver in it down just a little; if only Shorty's knife could reach up another foot . . . if only . . . And then the Hun cursed and Shorty laughed—a short, sharp laugh; for the knife was moving and the revolver was not. Inch by inch Shorty Bill's right hand was coming up towards the German's neck; and Mayhew, blind to everything else, never noticed the dying man in the corner.

Then suddenly it was over and Shorty laughed again. For a moment or two he supported the Boche; then he let him fall.

"A man—that." Shorty looked down on his late opponent lying at his feet. "Once—for a moment—I thought he'd got me."

"What about your presentiment, Shorty," laughed Mayhew, and even as he asked the question he got the answer.

With his dying effort the man in the corner had drawn his revolver unnoticed, and with Shorty's bayonet inside him still, he fired. Shorty spun round, and then slowly sank down on the floor.

"That about it, son," he said quietly. "No, no, lad—let him be. He only did what I'd have done myself, I reckons." He grinned feebly. "I guess I forgot the merchant altogether. And he's dead now, anyway."

Jim knelt down beside his friend, and supported his head.

"It had to come some time, boy, and my last was a good 'un. I reckons we'll talk that scrap over again in a few minutes." Shorty Bill's voice was feeble. "Don't forget it's your rifle you'll be wanting these days . . . infantryman's weapon . . . no damned bombs. . . ." His head fell forward; then he raised it with a jerk. "Write a note to the little gal, son. . . . Rose. . . . Letter's in me pocket." He was very nearly gone. Outside the noise of rifle fire was growing more intense, and shrapnel was bursting along the main road. "Good fighting, son. Pick your man and kill him. I guess it's the . . . only . . . way. It's a bloody game—but stick it, boy, stick it. It's all comin' right. . . . So long."

Thus did he die, and John Mayhew laid him down gently in the brick dust, beside the dead machine-gun team.

A rapid burst of Lewis-gun fire from the other side of the road warned him that it was unwise to linger, and with a final glance at his friend and instructor he went slowly out of the room. He took with him Shorty's knife—and in his pocket was the girl's address.

She would have forgotten all about him in all probability—and yet Shorty was not a man whom any one could forget. So he would write—when he got the chance—and tell her, that one man, at any rate, had thought about her at the end. . . .

“Where's Shorty?” The platoon sergeant passing down the trench saw the knife and stopped.

“Dead; and a German machine-gun team are dead too.” Mayhew came out of his reverie. “In that room—all four of 'em together—and one in the passage.”

“My God!” The sergeant regarded him in amazement. “In that house over there? A machine gun. When did it get there?”

“Last night, I suppose—to enfilade us.” Leaning against the parapet Mayhew watched the ground in front, and his eyes were weary. Away down on the left an attack was materialising, and it seemed to be spreading up towards them. “I guess that machine-gun team wasn't wasted from the Boche point of view—if they only knew.

“Is he still there?” demanded the sergeant.

"Yes. I'm going back for him later—if I can." Mayhew was still looking over the parapet. "Here they come."

And they came—for two hours. Firing ceaselessly the battalion watched the line of dead grow dense and denser; and all the time, in Mayhew's ears, were ringing those last words of his pal.

"It's a bloody game—but stick it, boy stick it. . . ."

Coolly and deliberately he shot, choosing each target with care. He seemed to be living in a dream, and only the sights of his rifle and the grey targets were real. And the room upstairs . . . where five men lay in their last sleep. . . .

Behind him the Headquarters farm was blazing fiercely; but he had no eyes for it. He only cursed when a great volume of black smoke rolled slowly between him and a certain group of Huns he was shooting at by the corner of a hopfield.

Then gradually the rifle fire died away, and he watched the white flares sent up by the Germans to show their gunners where they had reached. He felt dazed—and there seemed to be nothing to shoot at.

Then the shelling started. Shrapnel and high explosive rained down on the trench—on the road—on the village. And Mayhew sat in a sort of stupor against the parapet—turning over slowly in his mind a problem which he was accustomed to give his students. It struck him as being singularly futile—that problem; singularly out of touch with life as it was. Shorty couldn't have solved it; Shorty wouldn't even have understood the question. And Shorty repre-

sented life as it was. Then he laughed, and the man next him cursed bitterly and savagely.

The trench was being torn to pieces; it was ceasing to be a trench. Great tearing bursts came from all along it; jagged fragments whistled down, cutting through the branches of the trees that lined the road. And still the shelling went on. . . .

Mayhew lost all count of time; his sensations were confined to whether the next one would be close or far away. Ten yards from him what was left of his platoon sergeant and two men of his section, had slipped down to the bottom of a crater; a little farther along the company commander with his leg shattered was crawling along, cheering up the men. And suddenly Mayhew started to sob, while the man next him cursed again, bitterly and savagely. . . .

Then above the roar of the shells came the old familiar note—the sound of rifle fire. From different sectors all along the trench men were standing up and shooting across the road. The Huns were trying again with their infantry.

Mayhew ceased sobbing, and kicked the blasphemer next him, hard and true.

“Fire, you swab,” he croaked; “fire—God damn you.”

With his eyes blazing he belted away at the grey mass; saw it fade away—come on again; surge up to the road and melt into nothing. And running down the ranks there came a ragged pitiful cheer. . . .

It was the end—for the time; the Boche had failed.

Had the machine gun been in the house—who knows, but what he might have succeeded?

John Mayhew went on ration fatigue that night—and when he got back the battalion—or what was left of it—had pulled out of the line. Mayhew found his company near the smouldering farm, and in front—on the road—he saw a sight which made him pause.

For at the end of the village a dull, red glow was spreading, and every now and then a tongue of flame shot up into the night. It was Shorty's funeral pyre—and Mayhew felt glad.

"So long, old man," he muttered. "It's all comin' right—never fear."

CHAPTER II

THE TRUCE OF THE BEAR

“When he stands up as pleading, in wavering man-brute
guise,
When he veils the hate and cunning of the little swinish
eyes,
When he shows as seeking quarter, with paws like hands in
prayer,
That is the time of peril—the time of the Truce of the
Bear!”

—KIPLING.

I

OVER the land lay the Great White Silence. Rugged and beetling, with the sentinel pines creaking eerily on its slopes, the ridge stretched away to the North—to the land where the lights of opal and gold quiver and tremble in the skies, till the glory of them makes the beholder cover his face. From below, the ceaseless roar of the torrent, rushing through the gloom of the canyon, came monotonously to the ear of the man who crouched motionless beside one of the bleak firs. His keen eyes, steady and sharp as those of a lynx, were fixed unblinkingly on an opening in the hill-side twenty odd yards away; and in his hands, cradled in the grey moss round the tree-trunk, he held a

rifle. The pines were singing the song of the ages, with the icy wind from the everlasting snows as the accompaniment; but to the man it was just the solitude that he loved, the voice of the wild, the hush of the lone North mountains. He seemed not to feel the cold; remorseless and still he crouched there watching, the only human being in the whole mighty wilderness.

Suddenly he stiffened, and his grip tightened on the rifle. So small was the movement as to be almost imperceptible, and to a townsman, even if he had seen it, its reason would not have been clear. Apparently everything was just the same. The roar of the waters, the sighing wind moaning through the tops of the trees, the brooding land bright in the icy moon—all was just the same. Nothing had altered to make the silent watcher catch his breath with a little short hiss, and his jaw set firm till it might have been chiselled in rock. Nothing, that is, to the onlooker. But then he would have been a townsman, and to such the Law of the Wild is a closed book. For the watcher had heard the sound he had been waiting for, and he knew that his vigil was nearly over.

Pig eyes glinting, head roving from side to side as he sniffed the air, there shambled from the hole a monstrous grizzly. For a few seconds he paused at the entrance to his cave, conscious that there was danger, but unable to see where it lay. Grunting, he looked round; then he shambled forward a few paces, and stopped again; while the man waited, so motionless, that he hardly seemed to breathe. Then the bear saw

him and roared—a snarling roar of rage and fear. Man—the Lord of the Wild Things—had tracked him to his lair, and he knew what that meant. That silent, menacing figure, whose eyes seemed to bore into him, and whose hands held the stick of death—yes, he knew what that meant.

Suddenly he rose on his hind legs, and grunted again. If only he could get his enemy clasped once to him with those great hairy paws, if only he could squeeze and squeeze till the bones broke, if only—He shambled grotesquely forward, swaying from side to side, revolting and horrible, like some hairy, prehistoric man. He groaned and chuckled, “with paws like hands in prayer,” and then—

Through the mountain vastness an echo rang and was flung to the ravines on high. It mocked the sighing wind, it drowned the roar of the water, until, at length, it died away, lost and whispering in the everlasting snows.

With a grunt of satisfaction the man stepped out and shook himself.

“It’s when you plead and pray that I don’t like you, cully,” he said softly, touching the quivering carcase with his boot. “It’s the only time you’re really dangerous.”

II

Over the land lay the Great Grey Silence. A vast expanse of sticky slime stretched as far as the eye could see. Away to the left a charred skeleton house,

surrounded by some splintered toothpick trees, stuck out of the stagnant ooze. Every now and then would come a great rushing noise, followed by the roar of an explosion, and from the face of a desolate world there would shoot up a sullen, stifling cloud of black and yellow fumes. Gradually it would drift away, and once again a dull-grey sky would look down on a dull-grey world. The only splashes of colour lay in the pools of water—and they were sombre; God knows they were sombre. In each of the countless holes, which grew like a loathsome disease all over the grey country, there lay a pool, a stinking, filthy pool. Sometimes it was green, and covered with a white scum; sometimes it was grey and lifeless, just like the hole it lay in; sometimes it was red—

Things stuck out of the pools—bits of equipment, bandoliers, tins of bully beef. In some a mule, its legs stiff and pointing, would lie upon its back at a strange angle, its eyes glazed and lifeless. In some a man would lie sprawling, head downwards in the water, with white chalky hands which had scrabbled in the mud, and now were still. In some a knee would stick up above the loathsome, fetid water; in some things floated—things not good to look upon.

Crouching, shivering in the holes, were men—grey men. The mud on the sides of the holes was like the mud under London Bridge when the river is low, and in that mud lived the men. Not in all the holes—only a selected few along the lines which had been reached in the last advance. And even along that line the holes which were occupied were not continuous.

Scattered here and there, isolated and cut off, little groups of men crouched and lived. Sometimes one of the clouds of black and yellow smoke would shoot up from an occupied hole. Then other things would go up with it, and when everything had cleared away the hole would have changed. The sides would be yellow and black, save in one place where they were red, and sticking out of the pool, on which already the red scum was forming, would be a fragment. But it would not affect the other hole-dwellers. Probably they would know nothing of what had happened, and, even if they did, their job was to continue sitting on the side above the water. In fact, their only amusement was to cut a recess in the wet mud, in order to prevent themselves slipping down into the water. Sometimes an enthusiast would try and link up his hole with the next gentleman's; sometimes an inventive genius would try and drain his abode of bliss by cutting a trench into another unoccupied hole. But this latter pastime is not altogether to be recommended unless the cutter is quite sure of being able to put into practice the well-known theory that water does not flow uphill. It is most annoying, having cut the drain, to find that it is the other hole which empties into yours.

In one of these holes, crouching in a little recess he had dug, there knelt a man. His face, his hands, his clothes were coated thick with half-congealed mud; only his eyes, steady and sharp as a lynx, were fixed unblinkingly on a spot in the grey sea twenty odd yards away. There was no sign of movement, there

was nothing to distinguish the spot he was watching from the rest of the filthy slush, and yet for half an hour his eyes had never left it. The stinking earth in front was pitted and shattered, and glistened with the rainbow colours of wet mud, but the watcher's eyes were fixed on a gaping crack between two glutinous lumps. Cradled in his hand was a rifle—a rifle of which the sights were hidden and coated with the all-pervading mud, but a rifle in which the barrel was clean and shining. It didn't look much, that gun; it would have meant imprisonment for life on a rifle inspection; but it could be fired through, which was more than could be said for most of those that find their way to the Grey Land of Filth.

The man had been there since the advance at dawn. The lines of wading, struggling men had slowly advanced, now slipping out of sight into the stagnant pools, now pausing to pluck themselves from the glue. They had reached their objective—the group of holes lately occupied by the Huns—and they had killed the occupiers. In some cases the occupiers had killed them, which is the whole of war when shorn of its trappings and reduced to the language of those who perform. And, having reached their objective, they sat there, until in the fulness of time other wading, struggling men would sog down beside them in their shell holes, and they would be relieved.

Occasionally the onlooker might see a steel helmet move for a moment, in the huge sea of dirt, as a man's head came above ground-level; occasionally, in the distance, far back from the front line, a small party

of men might be seen floundering and heaving its way along. Then if the party was not too far away there would come a short, sharp crack, the hum of a rifle bullet, the "who-e-e" as it passed into the distance, and the party would duck hurriedly and disappear. They were being sniped—sniped from one of the countless holes that go to make the disease called Flanders. And one of the British snipers was the man who crouched in the hole, watching.

Up to date he had had ten targets, and he believed that six had been bulls. When a man can really shoot with a rifle, there is a sort of sixth sense which tells him when he's scored—a sense which tells him the difference between the man who ducks because it was near and the man who ducks because he is dead. It had amused him vastly through the long weary hours lying there, watching, waiting, and—then, the kick of the gun in his shoulder as he got his quarry on the foresight, the slow lifting of his cheek from the stock to watch the result. Twice had he seen his target throw up his hands and pitch forward, and one of those he could still see—a motionless lump sprawling out of a shell hole. And for the others—well, he hoped for the best with four, as I have said.

But for the last half-hour he had not been firing. Two good targets had come and gone, and he had watched them regretfully out of the corner of his eye, but he had made no attempt to fire at them; he had continued lying motionless, watching the spot a score of yards away.

Suddenly he stiffened, and his grip tightened on the

rifle. So small was the movement as to be almost imperceptible, and to the onlooker, even if he had seen it, its reason would not have been clear. Apparently everything was just the same. The grey stagnant sea, the charred skeleton houses surrounded by the splintered toothpick trees—it was all just the same. Nothing had altered, except that the silent watcher had seen what he was waiting for, and he knew that his vigil was nearly over.

Through the crack between the two glutinous lumps, there had shone for a moment a chink of light, and a little blob of mud had slipped forward. A hole made by a man's finger had appeared, and the sniper knew that he was being watched. Snipers are not popular with those they snipe.

And now he was waiting for the next move in the game of no mistakes.

It came quite quickly.

“Kamerad!” A voice hailed him—a voice with no visible owner. “Kamerad! I to surrender wish! Kamerad!”

“Then come over here with your hands up, Boche.” The sniper's voice, quick and incisive, answered the unseen speaker. “And keep your hands up, Boche.”

With his eyes unblinking, with his body so motionless that he hardly seemed to breathe, the sniper waited, his rifle still cuddled to his cheek. Suddenly a figure half rose, half shambled out of the ground in front. It was a grey-clad figure, and the face was coated grey, too. Only the eyes—pig eyes—roved from side

to side, as he looked for the sniper, and his arms and hands were raised as though in prayer. And then—

Over the desolate flatness a vicious crack rang out, and, mingled with it, the sullen phlop of a bullet which finds its mark at close range. It did not echo; there was nothing to cause an echo. It was, one moment, the next it was not.

With a grunt of satisfaction the man lowered his rifle and shook himself.

"It's when you plead and pray that I don't like you, cully," he said softly, watching the quivering carcase in front. "It's the only time you're really dangerous."

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You see it is the game of no mistakes, and the Boche had made one. He had failed to conceal the bomb in his hands—the hands that were raised in prayer.

CHAPTER III

THE AWAKENING OF JOHN WALTERS

SHOULD you ever wander round the ranks of the North Sussex and inspect the faces of the men in that celebrated battalion, you will find that the majority are of the type bovine. They are a magnificent, if a stolid crowd, and their fighting record is second to none; but as might be expected in a regiment recruited largely from those who have been born and bred on the land, the prevalent expression of countenance is wooden. And in the rear rank of Number Three Platoon—at least that is where he used to exist beautifully—you will find the winner of the competition.

John Walters—the individual to whom I refer—was a great specimen of a man as far as his physical development was concerned; with regard to his brain the less said the better. Moreover, he looked it. He viewed life philosophically, if he viewed it at all; and the only thing which had ever been known to stir him into the slightest semblance of excitement was the unexpected addition of three more to his already numerous family circle. But the strain of endeavouring to work out the increase in separation allowance that this would give to the painstaking Mrs. John proved

too much for him, and with only the briefest of struggles, he relapsed once again into his normal torpor.

My story is of the awakening which came to our friend on a certain hot day in May. It was not permanent—he is now as comatose as ever—but while it lasted I am given to understand it was quite a useful performance. And this was the way of it, on that morning in early summer.

For our scenery we must go to the front-line trenches in a certain district where mine craters grew and multiplied, and saps crept out, turning and twisting between the thrown-up mounds of earth on each side of them. In some places they were only ten yards apart—the English and the German sapheads—in others they were a hundred. But over the whole area there brooded that delightful sense of doubt and uncertainty which goes so far in cheering up its happy occupants. Complete ignorance as to where the next mine is going off, coupled with absolute certainty that it will go up somewhere, and that as far as you can see it's about your turn for attention, is a state of affairs at which only the most blue-faced pessimist could cavil.

And quite in agreement with that opinion was our friend John Walters on the morning of the day in question. At least it appeared so. To the casual observer the worthy John was quite content with his position; and if the thought ever crossed his mind that mines frequently went up in unexpected places, or that the saphead he was adorning was only fifteen

yards away from the nearest Hun one, it certainly was not reflected on his face.

Far from it. At the rise of the curtain he was lying sprawled on his back, and staring stolidly upwards.

He had been similarly occupied for the last hour, apathetically watching the stars pale gradually away, and the faint glow of dawn come stealing over the sky. Had he chosen to raise himself a little and look towards the east he could have seen the sun glistening like a gigantic orange ball, glinting through the thick white ground mist that covered everything; a sun that as yet had no heat in it. But John Walters did not choose to; he was quite comfortable, even if a little cold; and his mind was blank of any desire to be so energetic. Had anyone told him that this was the dawn of the most eventful day of his life, he would have contemplated the speaker without interest, spat with violence, and remarked in the fulness of time, "'Oo be you a-gettin' at?'"

After a while he shifted his position and ceased to gaze at the deepening blue above his head. He felt in each pocket in turn until he found an unpleasant-looking clay pipe whose bowl he carefully inspected. Apparently satisfied with what he saw he produced from another pocket a piece of plug tobacco; and having performed the mystic rite with due care and solemnity and the aid of a blunt knife, he thoughtfully rubbed the tobacco between his hands and stuffed his pipe with a square and dirty forefinger. Shortly after, the blue spirals of smoke ascending in the still

summer air proclaimed that John was having his matutinal pipe.

Occasionally, when he thought about it, his eyes rested on a little piece of looking-glass on a stick set into a sand-bag in front of him—a glass tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, which reflected the ground behind his back. It was the periscope at the end of the sap, and John was the sentry whose duty it was to look through it. The sap facing him ran back to the English front line. He could see the men asleep where it joined the trench twenty yards away—the others of the sap party; and every now and then he could see men going backwards and forwards in the fire-trench. He settled himself more comfortably, and again the smoke curled upwards in the motionless air, while John ruminated on life.

Far be it from me to blame our friend for thus indulging in a little quiet introspection, aided and soothed by My Lady Nicotine. The occupation has much to commend it at suitable times and in suitable places. Unfortunately, the head of a sap on the flank of a continuous line of craters at five o'clock on a misty morning fulfils neither of these conditions. Further, there seems to be but little doubt that the review of his life was of such surprising dullness that the worthy John's head fell forward three or four times with the peculiar movement seen so often amongst those who are known as earnest church-goers. It occurs at intervals throughout the sermon, to be followed instantly by a self-conscious glance round to see if anyone noticed. Only there was no one at the moment to watch

John, when his head first dropped slowly forward and his pipe fell unheeded to the ground—no one, that is, of whom our friend had any cognisance. But had his eyes been riveted on the periscope he would have seen a thing which would have galvanised even him into some semblance of activity.

Slowly, stealthily, a head was raised from behind a great hummock of chalky earth, a head surmounted by the round cloth cap of the German. Motionless the man stared fixedly at the little periscope—John's little periscope—then as if worked by a string the head disappeared; and when our hero, waking with a start, looked at the periscope himself with the guilty feeling that he had actually dozed on his post, once again it merely reflected the desolate, torn-up ground. But the German had seen John—and John had not seen the German, which is a dangerous state of affairs for solitary people in No Man's Land, when the range is about five yards.

It was just as our friend grunted and leaned forward to retrieve his pipe that it happened. Suddenly the saphead seemed to swarm with men who leaped into it out of the silent mists; a bullet-headed man seized John by the collar and yanked him out; the rest of the party seized the Mills bombs lying at the saphead, threw them at the sleeping picket near the fire-trench, and followed John's captor. In four seconds it was all over; the bombs burst in quick succession right amongst the picket, and when an infuriated and excited officer came rushing up to find out what the devil was the matter, the only traces that remained

were two dead men, a lance-corporal with a large hole in his leg, and—John Walters's unpleasant-looking clay pipe.

The next few minutes in our friend's life were crowded. Stumbling, half-running, and ever conscious of a large and ugly revolver pointed at his stomach, he was driven over the uneven ground for twenty yards or so, and then without warning he tripped up and fell into a trench which he found in front of him, followed almost immediately by four panting Huns, who mopped their brows and grunted in a strange tongue. John was still completely bemused—the whole thing had been so sudden—and he sat for a while staring at the Germans.

“Gaw lumme!” he remarked at last, scratching his head in perplexity, “if you ain’t the ruddy ‘Uns. This ‘ere’s a fair box-up—that’s wot it is.”

Almost mechanically his right hand wandered to his jacket pocket in search of his pipe, only to receive a crashing blow on the elbow from a revolver butt.

“ ‘Ere—wot are you a-playing at?” His tone was aggrieved. “Danged if I ain’t left my pipe in that there sap.”

“English swine.” One of the Germans spoke slowly, choosing his words with care. “You will later killed be.”

“Go hon.” John regarded him unmoved—he was still thinking about his pipe. “And look ‘ere, guv’nor, I ain’t ‘ad no breakfast.”

The German shook his head—our friend's accent was beyond him. Then seeming to realise that he was

failing to hate sufficiently, he brought the butt of his rifle down with great force on John's foot, and drove him along the sap with the point of his bayonet. The procession turned along the fire-trench—once again John tripped up; something hit him on the head, he felt himself falling down a timbered shaft, and then—no more.

Now, generally, when a man is taken prisoner he is removed with all possible speed to the rear, where he can be examined at leisure by men who know his language. At least, it is so in the case of German prisoners, and it is to be assumed it is so in the case of ours. Therefore our friend can deem himself lucky—though he certainly did not think so at the time—that the usual procedure was not followed in his case. Had it been, this more or less veracious narrative would never have been written; and our worthy John would even now be languishing in Ruhleben or some equally choice health resort.

He was roused from a sort of semi-stupor by a heavy kick in the ribs; and for a moment his mind was a blank—more even than usual. He was painfully aware that his head was very sore, and his stomach was very empty; and after he had completely grasped those two unpleasant facts he became further and even more painfully aware that a stoutly-booted German was on the point of kicking him again. He scrambled groaning to his feet; memories of the saphead had returned. The German pointed to the dug-out shaft; and when John again began remarking on the little

matter of breakfast the stoutly-booted foot struck another portion of his anatomy even more heavily. Our hero, perceiving that the subject was unpopular, and encountering for the first time in his life the doctrine of *force majeure*, reluctantly began to climb the shaft. A bayonet prodded into the region of the last kick, and having let forth a howl, he climbed less reluctantly.

When he at last emerged blinking into the daylight of the trench, he looked, as is the way with those who are of the earth earthy, at the sun; and found to his surprise that it was late in the afternoon.

“Lumme, guv’nor!”—he turned to the man behind him—“I ain’t ‘ad nothin’ to eat all day. Not since last night, I ain’t, an’ then a perisher dropped me bread in the trench and trod on it.”

His guard gazed at him impassively for a moment, and then kicked him quiet again—in the stomach this time—while two men sitting on the fire-step laughed gutturally.

“English swine!” One of them mockingly held out a piece of bread, and then snatched it away again, as John was about to take it.

“Swine, yer ruddy self,” he snarled, his slow buccolic temper beginning to get frayed.

But a rifle-butt in the ribs and a bayonet half an inch in his back showed him the unwisdom of such a proceeding; and he stumbled sullenly along the trench. It was lightly held, but everyone whom he did see seemed to take a delight in finding some hitherto unbruised part of his body to hit. At last, half sobbing with exhaustion and pain, he was propelled forcibly

into another dug-out, where behind a table lit by candles there sat a man studying a map. He felt a hand like a leg of mutton seize him by the collar, force him upright, and then hold him motionless. After a few moments the man by the table looked up.

"What is the number of the battalion you belong to?" He spoke in perfect English.

"The Sixth." John's spirits rose at hearing his own language. "An', look 'ere, guv'nor, I ain't 'ad no——"

"Silence, you dog." The officer cried out something in German, and again the rifle-butt jolted into his ribs with such force that he groaned. "What division do you belong to?"

"'Undred and fortieth." Our friend's tone was surly.

"Say 'sir,' when you speak to me. How long have you been in this part of the line?"

"I've been 'ere a month, guv'nor—I mean, sir."

"Not you, dolt." The officer stormed at him. "Your division, I mean."

"Strike me pink, guv'nor, I dunno—I dunno, reely."

The wretched John's small amount of brain was rapidly going. Again the officer said something in German, and again an agonising jab took him in the ribs. It was a mistake, that last jab, if only the officer had known it. Given food and comparative kindness, John, out of pure ignorance of the harm he would be doing, might have racked his brains and said a lot. But that last unnecessary blow made him sullen—and when a man of that type gets sullen the Sphinx is talkative in comparison. For half an hour the cross-

examination continued; were the men's spirits good, did they think they were winning, what was the food like? And, ultimately, the officer told him in a furious voice that even for an Englishman he'd never met such a mutton-headed fool. With a last parting kick he was hurled into a corner and told to lie there.

Bruised in every limb, he crouched dazedly where he fell; with the whole of the slow, fierce anger of the countryman raging in his heart against the officer who still sat at the table. Occasionally men came in and saluted, but no word was spoken; and after a while John noticed that he seemed to be writing occasional sentences on pieces of paper. Sometimes an orderly came in and took one away; more often he crumpled them up and threw them on the floor. And then he suddenly noticed that the officer had a peculiar thing fitted round his head, with two discs that came over his ears.

"Come here." The terse command roused John from his semi-dazed stupor; he realised that the officer was speaking to him. "Put these over your ears, and tell me if you recognise who is speaking."

He handed a similar pair of discs over the table, which the Englishman clumsily put on his head. At first he could hear nothing distinctly but only a confused medley of chirrups and squeaks. Then suddenly quite distinctly there came a clear, metallic voice: "Halloa! is that the Exchange? Give me Don Beer."

"Gawd!" said John, in amazement. "'Oo the 'ell is it?"

"That's what I want to find out," snapped the German. "Do you know the voice?"

"But it's in English." Our friend still gaped foolishly at this strange phenomenon.

"Do you know who it is, you dunderheaded idiot?" howled the officer, in a fury.

"Lumme; I dunno who it is. 'Ow should I?" John was aggrieved—righteously aggrieved. "Look out; the perisher's talking again."

"Is that you, Don Beer?" The thin voice came once again clearly to John. "Oh! is that you, Sally? Heard anything more about that man of yours they got this morning?" John noticed the officer was writing.

"Not a word, old dear. He was the world's most monumental idiot, so I wish 'em joy of him." Then once again the squeak chorus drowned everything else.

But John had heard enough. Regardless of the somewhat unflattering description of himself, unmindful of the officer's short laugh, he stared with amazement at the wall of the dug-out. For he had recognised that last voice.

"Who was that? D'you know?" The officer looked at John sharply.

"Well, I'm danged!" he muttered. "That last were old Sally—the old man."

"What old man, you fool?"

"Why, our colonel, guv'nor. There ain't more'n one old man."

"Oh!" The officer made a note. "So that was the colonel of your battalion, was it?"

"It wor, guv'nor—sir. An' if I might make so bold, sir, seeing as 'ow I 'aven't 'ad any food like since last night——"

"Silence, you worm." The officer got up, and struck him in the mouth. "We don't give food to Englishmen. Go back to your kennel. I may want you again."

He pointed to the corner, and resumed his seat, with the receivers of the listening apparatus over his ears once more. But John Walters was not interested—the entire performance left him cold. He wanted food, he wanted drink, and what German prisoners he'd seen had not wanted in vain. With a fierce smouldering rage in his heart, he lay hunched up, and his eyes never left the man at the table.

A far quicker-witted specimen than our friend might well have been excused for feeling a little dazed by the position in which he found himself. To be suddenly torn from the peaceful monotony of ordinary trench life; to be removed forcibly from his friends, deprived of his breakfast and of his pipe; to be stunned by a blow on the head and on recovering consciousness to have the pleasure of hearing his colonel describe him as a most monumental idiot does not happen to everyone.

To the unfortunate John, still partially dazed and therefore slower on the uptake than ever, the situation was beyond solution. The only dominant thoughts which filled his mind were that he was hungry, and that he hated the man at the table. Every now and then he fell into a kind of stupor; only to come to

again with a start, and see the same officer, with the same arrangement over his head, writing—writing. He was always writing, it seemed to John, and the constant stream of orderlies annoyed him.

God! how he hated that man. Lying in the corner, he watched him vindictively with his fists clenched and the veins standing out on his neck; then everything would go blurred again—his head would fall forward, and he would lie inert, like a log, practically unconscious. Men were moving; the officer was writing; he could still realise his surroundings dimly, but only with the realisation of light-headedness. At one time the dug-out seemed to be the taproom of the One Ton—a hostelry largely patronised by our friend in the days of peace; while the officer who wrote took unto himself the guise of the proud owner. At another he thought he was in the battalion orderly-room and that the man behind the table was his C.O. He tried to remember what his offence was, and why he was lying down, and why the escort was moving about instead of standing beside him. Then his brain cleared again and he remembered.

The exact act which cleared his senses was yet a further application of the boot by one of the dimly-moving figures. With a grunt John sat up and found beside him a hunk of unappetising-looking brown bread and a mug of water.

“Eat that up.” The officer was speaking. “Then I shall want you again—so be quick.”

John needed no second order. The fact that the bread was mouldly troubled him not at all; a hungry

man looks not a gift loaf in the interstices. With a rapidity which would hardly be commended in a brochure on etiquette, he fell upon that hunk of bread, and having demolished it he felt better. It was just as he was washing down the last crumb with the last drop of water that he saw the officer at the table spring to his feet, while the two orderlies beside him also straightened up and stood to attention. He looked round to find the reason of the commotion, and found another officer standing near him regarding him malevolently. Somewhat refreshed by his meal, the worthy John came to the conclusion that he disliked the new arrival's face almost as much as his original enemy's, and returned the look with all the interest he was capable of displaying. It was not a judicious thing to do, but our friend was not a past-master in the higher forms of tact. Once again the dug-out became animated. Hitherto untouched areas of his anatomy received attention from two scandalised orderlies, and the ruffled dignity of the new-comer—a bull-necked man of unprepossessing aspect—was soothed. It was only John Walters's fury that increased until it almost choked him; but then to the other occupants of the dug-out John Walters's fury was a thing of no account. And but for the next little turn in the wheel of fate, their indifference was quite justifiable. He was unarmed: they were not. And no man, even though he possess the strength of ten, is much use when an ounce of lead goes in at his chest and out at his back.

Completely disregarding the sullen prisoner, who

stood breathing a little heavily just in front of an armed orderly, the two officers started an animated conversation. John, it is perhaps unnecessary to state, understood not one word; his school curriculum had not included German. Even had they spoken in English it is doubtful if their remarks would have conveyed much to him; though they furnished the reason of his temporary retention in his present abode.

“Any success?” The new-comer pointed to the receiver-discs lying on the table.

“Yes.” The other officer held out one of the sets. “Try them on, and see what you think.”

“Have you identified any of the speakers?”

The bull-necked man was adjusting his instrument.

“Only the colonel of the North Sussex for certain. That unmitigated fool”—he glared at John, who scowled sullenly back—“is too much of a fool to tell one anything. He is the thing we got this morning asleep in a sap.”

The other nodded, listening intently, and for a while silence reigned in the dug-out.

To John the whole affair was inexplicable; but then a new and complicated listening apparatus might have been expected to be a bit above his form. He heard a salvo of shells come screeching past the entrance shaft, and realised with a momentary interest that they sounded much the same when they were English shells as they did when they were German. Then something hit the ground just outside with a thud, a something which he diagnosed correctly as a trench mortar bomb, and a second afterwards it exploded with a roar

which deafened him, while a mass of dirt and lumps of chalk rained down the shaft.

The occupants of the dug-out betrayed no excitement; only John longed, with an incoherent longing, that another sixty-pounder would roll down the shaft next time before it exploded. He felt he would cheerfully die, if only those two accursed officers died at the same time.

Then came another salvo of shells and yet another; while in rapid succession the Stokes and Medium trench mortars came crumping down.

“A bit hactive to-night,” thought John, listening with undisguised interest to the bursts outside. After all they were *his* bursts; he had every right to feel a fatherly pleasure in this strafing of the accursed Hun, even though his present position as one of them left much to be desired. A gentle smile of toleration spread over his face, the smile of the proud proprietor exhibiting his wares to an unworthy audience—and he glanced at the two officers. He noticed they were looking inquiringly at one another, as if debating in their minds whether it was an ordinary strafe or whether—

Suddenly the firing stopped, only to break out again as if by clockwork, a little farther away; and with that sudden change of target any doubts they had entertained as to the nature of the entertainment disappeared. They were being raided and they knew it; and any further doubts they may have still had on the matter were dispelled by a sudden shouting in the trench

above them, coupled with the sharp cracks of bursting bombs.

To John the situation was still a little obscure. His brain creaked round sufficiently to enable him to realise that something had occurred to break up the happy meeting and cause feverish activity on the part of his captors. Various strange instruments were being hurriedly stowed away in a corner of the dug-out to the accompaniment of much guttural language; but his brain was still trying to grasp what had happened when he saw a thing which quickened his movements. Completely forgotten in the general rush he stood by the table, while the others darted backwards and forwards past him, carrying the instruments; and then suddenly the quickener arrived. Rolling down the steps there came a little black egg-shaped ball, which John recognised quicker than he had ever recognised anything before. It was a Mills bomb, and the pin was out. He was no bombing expert, but the habits of a Mills are known to most people who live with the breed. Four seconds—and then a most unpleasing explosion, especially when in a confined space like a dug-out.

So John acted. With a dispassionate grunt, he seized one of the orderlies who was brushing past him at the moment, all unmindful of the danger; and having picked him off the ground as if he were a baby he deposited him on the bomb, just in time. Barely had the dazed Hun alighted gently on the bomb when the bomb went off. So did the Hun, and the fun began. John's playful action had—amongst other good

effects—prevented the lights from being blown out; and so at the trifling cost of one orderly he was in what is known as a strategically sound position. Moreover, he was in the most dreadful rage which had ever shaken his torpid disposition. Stunned by the sudden shock of the unexpected bomb and paralysed for the moment by the sight of the shattered man, the three Germans gazed foolishly at John Walters. And in that moment he went in at them. The second orderly fell like a stone with a blow on the point of the jaw which would have felled an ox; and only the two officers were left.

With a howl of rage the bull-necked officer rushed at him, and John grinned gently. He had no particular animosity against him: it was the other one he was after. So he hit him—once—and the bull-necked one slept, even like a little child.

Then for a moment or two John Walters stood still and contemplated the last occupant. Up above were his own pals, while down below his tormentor faced him alone. And they were on equal terms: they were both unarmed.

With a grunt of rage John caught him by the throat and shook him like a rat. All the fury pent up for so many hours came out as he bashed at his face with his fist. "No food, you dirty swine!" he muttered—bash, bash. "Kicked in me stummick, 'it in me mouth. I'll show yer—you perishin' 'Un! Come on upstairs and see the fun—come on, yer sausage-eating 'og!"

Bumping, heaving, pulling, he dragged the semi-conscious German up the shaft and with a mighty

effort heaved him into the trench. There was no one in sight, though all around him bombs were going off—while away on each flank and behind the trench a ceaseless series of explosions merged into one continuous blast. John grunted again, and heaved the officer on to the parapet.

“Back ‘ome with me this time, me beauty! Kicked in the stummick, no food since last night, and then a perisher trod on it. Gaw lumme, wot a life! Come on, yer swine!” and John got in the first real kick in the ribs with his boot. “Hup and hover. Gawd!—wot’s that?”

Clear above the din there came from the British lines a discordant braying, which rose and fell like the wailing of a giant animal. It was the recall signal to the raiders.

“ ’Op it, yer bla’guard, ’op it ’ard!” The bombing had died away, though the guns and mortars still roared. “In front of me, Mr. ’Un—in front of me. Some of our boys be light on the trigger.”

With the German firmly clasped to his chest the worthy John rushed him across No Man’s Land. “It’s Walters—John Walters,” he bawled at the top of his voice—“and a ’Un.” With a last final kick he sent him flying over the top of the parapet and fell in after him, breathing hard.

“What the devil?” An officer in the trench got up and gazed at the pair in amazement. “Who the hell are you?”

“John Walters, sir—and a ’Un.” He scratched his

head and mechanically kicked the recumbent German.
"Get up, yer swine, and speak to the orficer!"

"Are you the fellow who was taken prisoner this morning?"

"Yes, sir, that's me." He gazed vindictively at his enemy. "An' not a bit of food since last night, and then some perisher trod on it. Gaw lumme, wot a life! Lucky as 'ow the boys come over, sir, or I wouldn't 'ave 'ad none at all—not with that there swine."

"Great Scott!" murmured the officer. This sudden appearance of the lost sheep temporarily unnerved him.

Not so John Walters. Having administered a final kick to the groaning Hun, he slouched moodily off into the night. His rage had abated—there only remained one thing to do before food. Absolutely unperturbed by various red and green lights which were now going up continuously from the German trenches as a signal for help, quite unmindful of the heavy shelling which had now started on our own trenches, our friend strode on to his appointed goal.

"'Ave yer seen it lying about, mate?"

An astonished sentry peering into the darkness swung round sharply at the sudden voice behind him.

"Seen wot?" he demanded, crustily. "Wot are yer nosing abaht there for, an 'oo are yer, anyway?"

"John Walters, mate—John Walters, C Company."

"Lumme, but you was took prisoner this morning by the 'Uns!"

"I knows it—I knows all that. What I wants to know is—where's my ruddy pipe wot I dropped?"

Not a bit o' food since last night, and then some perisher trod on it. And now"—he was delving in the mud at the bottom of the sap—"danged if some other plurry perisher ain't been and gone and trod on this too!" By the light of a flare he ruefully examined two bits of a broken clay pipe. "Gaw lumme, wot a life!"

CHAPTER IV

THE PASSING OF THE SEASICK COW

GOOD evening, Jonah! And how is life, old top?" The man I was dining with greeted an officer passing our table with a cheery smile. "Come and tear a cutlet with us."

The other paused and regarded the speaker coldly. "James," he remarked, "you forget yourself. I can endure your face in the club at Poperinghe, I can even dally awhile with you in the boot shop at Bethune; but to dine with you in London and listen to your port-laden views of life is a thing which I will not do. My time is too short, James, to waste on such as you."

"He has affected that style of conversation," remarked James, sadly, to no one in particular, "ever since he came under the influence of love. Is she here to-night, Jonah, this unfortunate girl of whom you so often babble when you are in your cups?"

"For what other reason would I have put on my new thirty-shilling suiting? Of course, she's here, old boy; look—there she is coming down the steps. Some girl, Jimmy—what?"

He moved away to meet her, and with a nod and a grin to us came back past our table on the way to his

own. As he said, she was "some" girl, and our eyes followed them both as they threaded their way through the diners.

"Who's your pal, James?" I asked him, when the girl had disappeared round the corner. "His views on the suitable companionship at face-feeding times commend themselves to me at first sight."

He ignored the implication, and concentrated on the tournedos for awhile. Then suddenly he leaned back in his chair, stuffed his hands in his pockets, and contemplated me benignly.

"Peter," he remarked, "you are a lucky man. I am going to tell you a story."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed; "not that long one about the girl and the lodging-house? You told me that last time I saw you, and got it wrong."

"What a mind you have, Peter; what a mind. No, I am not going to tell you the story of the girl and the lodging-house, brilliantly witty though it is. I am going to tell you a story—a true story—about a Tank."

"Human or otherwise," I remarked, pessimistically.

James looked at me in pained surprise. "I am sorry to disappoint you: but—otherwise. Waiter—another bottle of champagne; the gentleman's thoughts have liquified as usual."

He thoughtfully drained his own glass and lit a cigarette. "I have no objection to your eating while I smoke," he remarked, kindly; "and a cigarette enables me to collect my thoughts and present to you my

story in that well-known style on which my fame as a raconteur is largely based."

"Well, just write down the point before you forget it, or——"

"Once upon a time, Peter," he commenced, in a withering tone, "the Belgians made Ypres, and the Lord made the country around it. By Jove! there's little Kitty Drayton. I must go and speak to her afterwards."

"Yes, I'd tell her of your monumental discovery if I were you. Your reputation as a conversationalist will be made for life."

After a depressing interlude, during which he failed signally to catch the lady's eye, he again turned his attention to me.

"At a later period the Hun intervened. I believe you saw much of his earlier endeavours, Peter, around that delectable spot?"

"I did; moreover, I have since revisited the haunts of my youth. I don't mind telling you, James, that I had a devilish near squeak——"

"And if I'm not too bored I might possibly listen —later, but not now; at present, it's my story, and it's very rude to interrupt. You may say yes or no, Peter, if your feelings overcome you; otherwise, kindly restrain yourself."

He once again endeavoured to catch the wandering optic of fair Kate, with the same result as before; a bad starter at any time is James, but he frequently finishes well.

"The story which I am going to tell you concerns

Wipers, in that it took place there or thereabouts. North-east of it, round about that cheerful little inland health resort, St. Julian. A nasty spot, Peter, a nasty spot."

"Personally, I confined myself principally to Hooge," I murmured. "But I accept your words without prejudice."

"So much for the locality. The conditions need not detain us. Just one enormous morass of filth and mud and water and shell-hole; just the ordinary sort of country only a bit worse, and everything as damnable as it could be. Ugh, horrible! Let us come to pleasant subjects—to wit, the Seasick Cow—the principal actor in the drama.

"The Seasick Cow," he silenced my frivolous interruption with a glance, "was, and for all I know is at the present moment, a Tank. On the other hand, it may quite possibly be scrap-iron, as the position in which it was last seen goes into the air twice hourly. That, however, is immaterial; what I want to tell you about is her last voyage, which was by way of being a bit of an epic.

"I suppose you've heard of the new Hun pill-boxes. They are nasty contrivances made of reinforced concrete, and are dotted promiscuous-like all over their front. When hit by a shell the entire performance moves back a little farther, and the garrison, having sorted the sausage out of the mix-up, resume their interrupted breakfast two or three feet nearer Berlin. It was up against a little nest of these that the Powers that Be decided to do a bit of a strafe. They

told off the Feet who were to be the proud and delighted performers, and they gave 'em the Seasick Cow to help 'em. Then they gave them their blessing, and retired to await developments.

"Now the Cow was apparently *the* Tank of the Section. The whole crush are most inordinately proud of their machines, and spend hours in titivating up the interior; when I went inside the Cow once, her detachment had fairly spread themselves. The engine shone till you could see your face in it, and a Kirchner picture over the driver's head helped him to keep his eyes in the boat. Parts of her had been painted blue with a delicate *motif* of purple, and one only wanted a hat-track and a bath in the corner to have the ideal week-end cottage."

"Your picture," I murmured, "is most explicit."

"All my pictures always are." James frowned absently at a passing waiter. "Have you ever been inside a Tank, Peter?"

"Once," I answered, reminiscently, "after a heavy lunch. The Army Council stood outside and applauded, whilst I——"

"Army Council!" James interrupted me in his most withering tone. "Then it was in England you did the deed?"

"Where else," I returned, "would you expect to find the——? But, hush! We are observed. Yes, it was in England—many moons ago, when I was on leave, that——"

"I am quite certain the story is immoral, so I won't trouble you any more. All I wanted to know before

I really began was if you knew what the inside of a Tank was like. Apparently you do, so I will continue. A little '65 brandy, waiter, and a cigar."

James settled himself comfortably in his chair, and inspected his liqueur with the eye of a connoisseur. "One can't get it in France, you know, this stuff. I never can make out why not. However, Peter—having got past your digressions, let us proceed.

"The line, at the particular spot where this drama of the Seasick Cow was enacted, was in a state of flux. You know the sort of thing I mean: no man knows what his next-door neighbour doeth, but is merely the proud possessor of a shell-hole, water-logged, mark one. In the course of a previous operation we had captured the Green line, or the Blue line, or some bally line—I forget which: and our outposts had consolidated themselves—I don't think—in the unprepossessing piece of country in front. Which merely meant that A Company—much against its will—sat in slush and great peril one hundred and fifty yards nearer the Hun than anyone else. Now for the Hun.

"Away in front, three or four hundred yards on A Company's right, there rose a little mound, and beyond the mound, which was really the end of a sort of small spur, was a small valley. At the other side of the valley was another little hillock with the remnants of a farm on top. . . . All right, Adolphus: my friend will pay for any damage I do to the table-cloth."

James shoved away a waiter, who was raising protesting hands to Heaven at the deep gouges in the

cloth, by means of which my friend was endeavouring to show me the run of the ground.

"A valley crossing your front," I repeated, "screened from view by a small spur. And the principle of defensive war is the counter-attack."

"Clever boy!" James beamed upon me. "Why you aren't Commander-in-Chief has always been one of life's little mysteries as far as I am concerned. But there was something else, Peter: between the little spur and the hillock with the farm-house, and right at the very entrance to the valley, were a couple of pill-boxes. Do you take the situation?"

"With exactitude," I answered. "Process."

"This was the little bundle of fun which the Seasick Cow in company with the Feet were detailed to attack, hold, and consolidate."

"The answer," I remarked, gently, "being a lemon. I always like to hear of these things after they've happened, and the band is playing, and the women are beautiful. If that wretched girl does happen to see you looking like that by any chance, and complains to the man with her, I will not be your second. My sympathies are all with her."

James came-to from his third frenzied endeavour on the unconscious Kitty and looked hurt.

"If there is one thing I loathe," he said, coldly, "it's jealousy. However," he went on after a moment, "that was not all they were told to do. It was thought that fresh vistas would open before their delighted gaze, once they were the proud possessors of that val-

ley, and further developments were left to the initiative of all concerned."

"Which makes it two lemons." I looked at James sternly. "Cut the tackle, my lad, and get to the 'osses. It's closing time here for all officers shortly, and we have foolishly forgotten to come in mufti. No chance of pretending we're on any important war-work."

"True, Peter; true. At times you're quite bright. I will get down to it. At 3.30 a.m. on a murky morning in August, *la belle vache* sogged wearily forward. She ploughed through shell-holes, and she squattered over mud, and generally behaved in the manner of all Tanks. She passed through A Company, and A Company waved her on her way rejoicing—they were not the party detailed to go with her; and in a few minutes she had disappeared from view in front. Once or twice her machine-guns pattered out their joyful note, as they discovered a wily Boche lurking in a shell-hole; a bomb or two burst viciously in the dawn, but the old Cow sogged gently on. Then some Feet came through A Company—a party of the force detailed to act with the Tank, and from then on the usual confusion prevailed. Moreover, Peter, my story is now largely hearsay—though from much evidence, I can guarantee its truth. I think I will give it to you from the point of view of the crew of the Cow."

"Just on time, gentlemen. Any more liqueurs?" A solicitous waiter hovered around our table.

"Of course," I answered. "Make them double ones. Knowing this officer, I'm afraid it may be a long busi-

ness. Now, James, as Tank Commander—carry on."

"The first thing the Cow encountered, bar a passing machine-gunner or two, whom they despatched rapidly to a better, or, at any rate, less muddy world, was a pill-box. That was the one on the near side of the valley just beyond the first spur. Sport poor. The garrison ran like hell, and the light was too bad for good shooting. Only one man was caught for certain, and he slipped in endeavouring to negotiate a shell-hole. He slipped, as I said, and so did the Cow on top of him. A sticky end." James meditatively sipped his brandy: and we pondered.

"Then the Cow passed on. The arrangement was that she should make good the pill-boxes, and should then advance up the valley behind the infantry. But, unfortunately, mundane trifles intervened. Half-way between the two pill-boxes she stuck. In the vernacular she got bellied, and her infuriated crew realised that only extensive digging operations *from the outside* would save the situation. Which was annoying considering the fact that they were well within the German lines, and had so far sent only ten Huns to account for their nefarious past.

"However, there was nothing for it, and so the crew watched the Feet go past them, and they got out to investigate. And they were still investigating when a couple of hours later the infantry started to come back. Life, so the Tank Commander gathered, had not been all it might, two or three hundred yards further on; more pill-boxes had appeared, with machine-guns placed in cunning nooks, and altogether the

place was too hot for comfort. So, seeing that the operation was only a local one, the infantry officer in charge had decided quite rightly to withdraw, in order to save further useless loss of life.

"You get the picture, Peter!" James leaned forward with his eyes on me. "Trickling back slowly—the infantry; bellied and stuck—the Tank, a quarter of a mile in front of our own lines. Time—6 a.m. on a summer's morning."

"Pleasant," I answered. "What was the Hun doing?"

"At the moment—not much. There was a lot of machine-gunfire in front, but practically no artillery. Then suddenly down came the barrage, and the Tank's crew hurriedly ceased their investigations and got inside. When they looked out again what was left of the infantry had disappeared."

"So," I said, "if I take the situation correctly, at the period we have got to at present, we have Tanks, one, disabled, with crew, a quarter of a mile odd in front of our outpost line, squatting at the point where a small hidden valley running across our front debouched into the open. Given in addition that the valley was obviously made for the massing of a counter-attack, and that one might reasonably be expected in the near future, we have all the setting for what our old pal Falstaff would have described as 'indeed a bloody business.' Don't interrupt me, James; I know it wasn't Falstaff, but he might just as easily have said it as anyone else. Question: What did 'A do—A being the Tank Commander?'"

"When you've quite finished, I propose to tell you. And before I begin, what would you have done?"

"Hopped it like h—er—that is, I should immediately have beaten a strategic retreat, and reported to the man farthest in rear who would listen to me that I had, with deep regret, left the Seasick Cow bellied in the Hun lines, and please might I go on leave?"

"And no bad judge, either. But not so the Tank wallah, Peter, not so—but far otherwise. It may have seemed to you that up-to-date I have been speaking with undue flippancy; I'll cut it now, old man, for what I'm going to tell you is absolutely great. At 8 a.m., then, on a certain morning—the barrage being over—that Tank Commander found himself deserted. In front of him an occasional Hun dodged from shell-hole to shell-hole, but taking it all the way round there was peace. Behind him were his own people, but having bellied in a little fold in the ground, he was out of sight from them. And there was a counter-attack expected. So he called together his warriors and told them the situation; then they sat down and waited. He whose soul lay in the engines continued to polish them mechanically; the paint artist removed dirt from his handiwork and cursed fluently—while the remainder breakfasted on bully. Then they waited again.

"'If they start massing,' were the Tank Commander's orders, 'pop outside with the guns, get them into shell-holes, and let 'em have it. Then get back inside.'

"At midday the Hun put down a barrage on our

own front line, and almost at once their infantry started massing in the valley. They came on in line of small columns, paying not the slightest attention to the Tank, which they thought was deserted. A beautiful target, Peter, one to dream about. From about a hundred yards did our cheery warriors open fire, and allowing for exaggeration, the bag was about two hundred. So that counter-attack did not materialise, and the crew had dinner.

“But now the whole aspect of affairs had changed, for the Huns knew that the Tank was very far from deserted. Given a good sniper, unlimited time, and ammunition, and a hole to shoot at, however small, sooner or later he will get it. It was about four o’clock that the monotonous ping-ping of bullets on the Cow’s hide changed to a whistling flop, and with a drunken gurgle the painter crashed down on to the floor, and lay there drumming with his heels. Ten minutes later he died, and the crew had tea.

“Thereafter there was silence. Occasionally one of the men sitting motionless at his gun got in a shot at a fleeting target; but gradually dusk came on, the half-light time when one fancies things, when the bushes move and the hummocks of mud crawl with men. Then came the night.

“At 9 p.m. the Tank Commander had decided to send an N.C.O. back to our lines to inform them of the situation; and at 9 p.m., therefore, the door was carefully opened, and a sergeant descended into the darkness. The next instant there was a guttural curse and a snarling, worrying noise. He had fallen on top

of a Hun, and had only just time to stick a bayonet through his throat and jump back into the Tank again, and batten down the door when the Boches were all over them. For six long weary hours did they clamber over that Tank, bursting bombs on the top, trying to fire through loopholes, shouting to the crew to surrender. And the only answer they got was: 'For Heaven's sake go away; we can't sleep.' One proud Berlin butcher planted a machine-gun a yard from the door, and fired at it point-blank for an hour. Result —*nil*; except that just as he was going away, being a-weary of his pastime, his head coincided with the muzzle of one of the bigger guns of the Seasick Cow. A nasty death—though quick. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

"Twenty-four hours, Peter, up-to-date—quite enough, one would think, for the ordinary man. But not so for that Tank Commander. When the first chinks of light came stealing in through the loopholes, he took stock of his surroundings. Men can't go on firing point-blank through a Tank for six odd hours without doing some damage; and though a cautious survey of the ground outside revealed a pretty bag of dead and dying Huns, a continuous groaning from the corner by the engine showed that there was trouble inside as well. The groaning came from the sergeant, who had got the splinter of a bomb in the stomach, and across his legs lay another of the crew stone dead, shot through the heart. The polisher of engines was morosely nursing a right hand which hung

down limply and dripped, and yet another had taken a bullet through the shoulder.

“‘Boys,’ remarked the Tank Commander, ‘things have looked better—sometimes. But—they may put up another counter-attack to-day. What say you? Shall we pad the hoof?’

“‘An’ let them ruddy perishers ‘ave the Cow? Not on your life, sir, not on your life.’ The engineer scowled horribly. ‘Besides, the boys may come back soon.’

“‘Ear, ‘ear.’ The sergeant’s voice was very feeble. ‘Stick it out, sir, for Gawd’s sake.’

“‘Right you are, boys. Them’s my sentiments. Let’s have breakfast.’

“The next day was hot for a change—sweltering hot, and by the time the Boches put in another counter-attack the sergeant was delirious. It was a much more cautious affair this time, for they mistrusted that squat, silent machine. All the morning snipers had potted at her from three sides without effect, only the monotonous thud of the bullets lulled the remnants of the crew to sleep. It just requires a little imagination, Peter, that’s all, to get the inside of that Tank. Two dead, one delirious, two more wounded, and—well, we will not specify further details. And brooding over all, an oppressive, sweltering heat, through which the sergeant moaned continuously and begged for water, while the others slept fitfully as best they could.

“Then came the second counter-attack. Once again the barrage on our own front lines roused the crew

and they stood to their guns: once again they saw those small columns of Huns coming on. As I said, it was a far more cautious affair this one, and targets were hard to pick up; but they did pick 'em up, and for the second time the counter-attack failed to materialise. The thing which did not fail to materialise was an odd shot through one of the loopholes which found that a man's eye is not bullet-proof. And that made three dead. . . .

"At dusk they held another Council of War, and the Tank Commander gave tongue. 'Go forth,' he said, 'even like the penguins from the Ark and tell unto the Feet behind us that we are sore pressed, but that our tails—in so far as they remain—are in a vertical position, above our heads. Also that we have slaughtered large quantities of Huns, and would have them join us in this most exhilarating sport.'

"'Even so, O King,' spake out he of the wounded flipper, 'but who is to go? For upon casting my eye round the court circle, beside yourself there is but one unwounded man.'

"Forgive me thus bursting into language of rare beauty, but I'm afraid it's the brandy." James thoughtfully lit a cigarette. "I gather that words ran high in the Seasick Cow when the Commander insisted on the one unwounded man, accompanied by him of the damaged lunch-hooks, going back and leaving him. For a while they flatly refused to go, and it was not until he had sentenced them both to penal servitude for life that they reluctantly agreed to obey orders. And so at 8 pip emma on the second day they

shook one another by the hand, grunted as is the manner of our race, and cautiously dropped out of the entrance and this story."

"Which up-to-date is not bad for you, James," I reassured him, kindly.

"At the beginning of the second night, then," he continued, coldly, "we find our Tank Commander practically alone. Three of his crew were dead, the sergeant unconscious, and the rest in varying stages of delirious babblings. And though it is easy to talk of here, yet if you will picture your own wanderings in No Man's Land, with the flares shooting up, and the things that were which jibber at you, and having pictured that, imagine yourself inside a Tank, with occasional shafts of ghostly light flooding through loopholes and shining on the set dead faces of the crew, I think you will agree that there are better ways of spending the night. Not a soul to speak to coherently: only one man who thought he was in Smithfield Market selling meat and monotonously called the prices, and another who was apparently playing mental golf round Westward Ho! Then, as a finale, the sergeant who occasionally came to and moaned for water: but being hit in the stomach, Peter, he couldn't have any. Those three and the dead. . . .

"At 10 pip emma came the Huns again. They swarmed all over the Tank for the second time, and dodging from loophole to loophole was the Tank Commander. Sometimes he blew a man's head off from point-blank range, sometimes a bullet whizzed past his own and ricochetted round the inside of the Cow.

About twelve the golfer was hit through the heart, and shortly afterwards the Smithfield gentleman went clean crazy. He alternately fired a Very pistol and one of the guns into the crowd outside, and, finding this too slow, endeavoured to open the door and charge. Then somewhat mercifully he collapsed suddenly and lay on the floor and babbled.

“About 4 next morning the Huns went away again, and the Tank Commander had just enough strength left to stagger to the gun and draw a bead on a stoutish officer some fifty yards away, who seemed very annoyed about something—probably the fact that the Cow was still there. He pulled the trigger, and the shell apparently burst on the officer; which must have been still more annoying for the poor man. Then with a short sigh of utter weariness he collapsed and slept. And the evening and the morning were the second day. . . .

“About three o’clock the next day we went forward preceded by a creeping barrage. Funnily enough, I personally found the mechanic and the other warrior. They had encountered a Hun patrol, and things had evidently moved. They were all dead—four Huns, and the two Tankites. The mechanic had apparently used a spanner with effect: he still had it gripped tight in his right hand. Then we went on and saw the Tank for the first time, because, being fresh troops, we knew nothing about it. It was dead—lifeless: but not so dead or lifeless as the mass of Germans heaped around it. The barrage reached it,

played on it, and passed on; we reached it, looked at it, and were about to pass on when suddenly the door opened and a haggard-looking, blood-stained wreck appeared in it.

“‘What a shindy!’ he remarked. ‘It’s woken me up.’”

“Lord, how the men laughed. It takes a lot to make anyone laugh who is trying to walk over Flanders, but they howled—he looked so confoundedly peevish. Then a couple of them looked inside the Tank and ceased laughing to be sick.

“‘Got two stretcher-bearers?’ asked the apparition. ‘My sergeant’s been hit in the stomach for forty-eight hours.’

“We found him two, and the last I saw of him for a few days he was wandering back with his sergeant through the filth. Met him often since at Poperinghe in the club, and at Bethune. . . . Night-night, Jonah. When are you going back?”

“In five days, old boy. It’s a hard life, is not it?”

Jonah and his girl passed slowly up the steps, and I watched them as they went.

“Poperinghe! Bethune!” I murmured, slowly. “Is he the cause, by any chance, of your interesting but somewhat irrelevant yarn?” As I spoke the glitter and scent, the lights and the women, seemed blotted out by another picture: a grim picture with a Tank for setting, a squat motionless Tank dripping with blood, surrounded by death.

“Of course,” answered James, briefly. “Three days

and three nights in the belly of the whale: three days and two nights in the belly of the Tank.

"But, by Jove! there's Kitty on the move. Good-bye, old man. You might pay."

CHAPTER V

GALLERY NO. 31

THE Tunnellers sat at meat. Much has been written concerning the Birds of War, and their antics and their gambols and the presents which they drop from great heights on an unworthy population below. They have been likened to swarms of mosquitoes twisting and dodging in the sunlight over some stagnant pool; they have been likened to a flight of geese coming out of the chilly dawn over the frozen marshes. They have been likened to many things which appeal to the imagination of those who sit and look on at the game over the water, and no allegorical fancy is half so wonderful as their reality. But for the moment I would turn to the other end of the military scale: the department of the fighting machine which measures in inches where the Birds reckon in leagues; the branch which lives in the darkness. The sunlight does not shine on them; their deeds are not watched by interested thousands on both sides of No Man's Land. In fact, to a casual visitor in the trenches their very presence might be unsuspected. Periodically, as you pass up Maida Vale or the Edgware Road, or any of those communication trenches which stretch

back from the front line till they gradually peter out and come to the surface—periodically you will meet a party of men coming the other way. They will not be shaven, and their faces and clothes will be caked with white; also they will look rather tired. It is the last shift leaving the mines in front, and going out to rest.

And when you go on, and come eventually to the front line, you will see occasional shafts sticking down into the ground—timbered shafts, like the entrance of a dugout. Perhaps a monstrous pair of bellows will be heaving gently at the top, worked by two men who smoke and spit. Perhaps you will see some sand bags coming up the timber slide which runs down the centre of the shaft: sand bags which are full of chalk and are hauled up by another man who smokes and spits. And when he has got the sand bag the rope goes down again to some one at the bottom. You can just see his white face ringed by the darkness; you can hear him whistling and see the tug on the rope when the next bag is made fast. Beyond him you cannot see; beyond him—stretching perhaps for a quarter of a mile towards the Hun, and for many quarters sideways—lies the abode of the moles. The chalky unshaven men have come from the darkness underneath; they were relieved by the next shift, who are down there now. But you can only see a few sand bags and an infantryman cleaning his rifle in the sunlight of the trench near by. . . .

Sometimes the earth will suddenly rock and shake, and as you look over the top of the trench you may

see—if you are quick—some heaps of dirt flying up half a mile away on the right. Also you may see the faint pink orange glow of ammonal, and you will assume quite rightly that a small mine has been blown. But even as you come to this conclusion, and decide to wander on, you will find beside you a man who blinks. In his hand he holds an instrument of which it would not be well to speak, and even as he blinks in the sudden strong light he is peering round to find that pink glow.

"Did you notice where it was, sir?" he asks, and then he sees it himself and grunts. Perhaps he may confide in you, more often he grunts again and writes something with a blunt pencil on a dirty piece of paper. Then he departs whence he came: down below—into the dark—with his instrument. There had been something doing in the under world, and the listener below was there to record these doings. . . .

And so, as I said before, the Tunnellers sat at meat; in other words, the officers of the 999th Tunnelling Company R.E. were consuming their dinner. The conversation was singularly unconnected with war and correspondingly dull topics; in fact, at the moment Strickland, late of Yukon, held the Speaker's eye. He had but recently returned from ten days in the land of his birth, and so was an oracle.

"What is the best thing to see in Town, Joe," demanded Brandsby, who in two days was to go and do likewise.

Strickland grunted. "There are revues, my boy," he affirmed, "by the score. What is lacking in plot

is made up in leg in all of them; and it is very beautiful. But I'm thinking you're too young."

Brandsby laughed. "My dear Joe, aren't you aware that you are one of those poor helpless Colonials for whom special legislation is required? To expose you, my poor angel boy, to the perils of the London streets, is nothing short of diabolical wickedness. Tell me, my lad, lest I burst into tears, that you always went straight home to bed, and never, never played any games for money with strangers."

"And when I think," chimed in the Major, "that this high moral tone is entirely due to me! Pass the port, Brandsby, and we will hear the worst."

Strickland grinned reminiscently. "Tell me, souls, do I look particularly innocent?"

The chorus in reply drowned a passing shell, and its tenor would not have flattered a Sunday School teacher.

"Thank you," murmured Strickland. "It's nice to know these things. I met a lad of the village in the bar at the —, well, I won't say where, with Brandsby going home. He was such a nice man; told me he'd been in the Army and been gassed. Poor chap! And he had such a charming face. Dressed so nicely, with pearl studs in his shirt."

"Come round to my place afterwards, old boy," he said effusively, "and have a drink, and tell me how things are going over the water."

Brandsby passed his hand across his forehead. "I feared as much," he whispered brokenly.

"I went." Strickland began to fill his pipe. "It was

half an hour—fairly cautious of him, I thought—before two more came in. Such nice men, too; and a girl as well: such a darling. Except for the tactless placing of one of the electric lights, I should never have noticed that her hair was of a different colour near the roots to the glorious gold which coiffed about her head. Good word that, coiffed. Oh, she was a dear! A trifle mechanical, perhaps, in her smile, owing to the thickness of her complexion—but such a dear. I held her hand when the men went out of the room, and told her an aunt had just died and left me a thousand, which I intended to spend on leave. She was so kind and sweet about it: called me a naughty boy, and got so excited that she had trouble with her false teeth. Poor little thing—I looked away, of course."

"Joe, you are an old scoundrel." The Major was shaking with laughter.

"I fail, sir," remarked Strickland in pained surprise, "to see any cause for hilarity. After a while the men came back, and then of course it was rather unfortunate. Her eyelashes were—er—wonderfully long, and apparently sticky. Why, of course, I don't know, except that they were very black; I suppose I oughtn't to have been looking; she thought I wasn't, and she gave them the comedian's wink—the sort the gallery sees. And the poor child's eyelids stuck. It was dreadful. I thought of offering her a match with which to unstick them, but then it struck me that perhaps it wasn't my business, so I lit a cigarette instead. Then, fortunately, my first friend proposed a quiet

game at a place he knew. Quite time, too, because it was getting late.

"Such nice, kind hospitable people they were whom we went to. I had a pint and a half of real good wine and a pot of caviare to my own cheek as soon as I got there. And then, seeing I was nervous, the dear girl came and offered to show me how to play."

"What was the game, Joe?" demanded Brandsby

"Baccarat," answered Strickland mildly, and the men howled. On the subject of Joe Strickland and cards a volume might be written. There is the story, for instance, of the gambling saloon in Dawson City, and Joe and two greasers, which has long been shouting for publicity. But it must keep.

"She explained the rules to me," went on Strickland, when the noise had subsided, "and after a while I staked a pound and won. Wasn't it wonderful? Then I put on ten pounds and won again. She was delighted, dear little thing, and squeezed my arm.

"Sweetest of girls," I murmured into her ear. "I'm so excited I must have some more champagne." So we had another half-pint, and then I looked at my watch. "Good gracious me," I exclaimed, "it's five to three. I must go."

"Oh, the disillusion of that moment! Her face froze: yea, verily, the varnish cracked! 'Go,' she spluttered, 'why, you've only just come.'

"Only too true, my angel," I whispered tenderly, "but my mother sitteth in the cold, cold hall, waiting for her baby boy."

Strickland thoughtfully drained his whisky. "It

was very sad and terrible, that episode. I felt that I had misjudged human nature. The baccarat table broke up like a log jam bursting, and they all talked at once. They were most offensive, and they surrounded me as I reached the door. He of the pearl studs gibbered.

"At last they let me speak. 'Dear friends,' I remarked affably, 'I have enjoyed my evening immensely. The champagne was good: the caviare excellent; but the baccarat, I grieve to say, was poor.' Then they jostled me, and I became annoyed. 'You half-baked Sheeny,' I said to Mr. Pearl Studs, 'I've forgotten more about cards than any of you damned bohunks ever knew. I've seen crooked shows run in most every corner of the globe, and this stunt wouldn't take in a looney who thought he was a poached egg. Then, to cap it all, you swabs of the gutter, you give me a dud fiver amongst my winnings. I'll just change that now.'

"But I had to lay two of them out before I could. Then I left." Joe Strickland smiled reminiscently. "Some evening!"

"And these are the men for whom the keepers of England's morals grieve and wax sad," sighed Bransby. "I'm afraid you're a hard case, Joe."

Strickland grinned, and stretched himself. Under the sleeves of his coat one could trace the swell of his muscles, and the whole poise of the man spoke of his perfect fitness, his immense physical strength.

"I'd like to meet that crowd again in London,"

he grinned. "The brass of them; the ineffable gall. Baccarat! Great Scott! they couldn't swindle at snap."

As he spoke the door of the mess hut opened, and a grey-caked subaltern entered. "And here is the kid—full of war and chalk."

"Hullo, Joe! good leave?" The new-comer pulled off his steel hat and flung it in a chair. "Excuse my coming in in this filthy condition, sir," he said to the Major, "but there's a bit of trouble up in 31 Gallery."

Joe Strickland sat up and took notice. "31," he said. "And what are they doing there, Dick?"

"Well, you'd smell it easier than I would, Joe," returned the other, "you know it so much better. But that corporal of yours with the flattened face is not easy in his mind."

The Major looked up from the map he was studying. It was just an ordinary trench map with one or two additions, which are about the only things not revealed by aeroplane photographs. They were red and black and purple lines, and some stretched across the front, and some ran out towards the front and finished abruptly. Thus were the shafts and galleries, the cross-cuts and counter-galleries shown on paper for all to see; whilst others in dotted lines marked the estimated positions of the Germans. It was just the bottom layer of the war that is waged above, on, and under the ground. And for the above ground no maps can be made—the air is uncharted. For on the ground the maps are so accurate that the damned thing has become a science. But for under the ground there

is still the element of doubt: the dotted lines are not always right. . . .

"31," said the Major slowly. "You've never been certain about that Hun counter-gallery to your right, have you, Joe?"

"Not certain, sir, but as near it as makes no odds," Strickland was looking thoughtful. "I think I'll turn in at once, and get up there early to-morrow morning."

"I'll come with you, Joe," said Brandsby. "I want to have a final look at that new cross-cut in my bit."

Now it is not my intention to give a treatise on the somewhat involved subject of military mining in France to-day. Starting early in 1915, in a free and easy way, each side bored tunnels under No Man's Land, and having filled the end with explosives blew them in, to the annoyance of those who happened to be on top at the time. The system was haphazard, the tunnels promiscuous. If a general desired blood to be shed in a novel manner, he ordered a mine, and his desire was frequently gratified. But there the matter ended. Except for the decease of the miners or the mine, or both, no one was any forrader.

And so, each side realising that the question was capable of considerable expansion, system gradually took the place of individual enterprise, and underground warfare on a definite plan became an additional joy for the unhappy beings involved. The system is far too long and complicated to describe, and, in addi-

tion, I rather believe is confidential. But before I proceed with the adventure which befell Joe Strickland and Dick Brandsby in Number 31, it will be necessary to give, very briefly, one or two broad facts.

In mining the tactics are much the same as in anything else. From both sides of No Man's Land galleries are pushed out to feel for the enemy, who in his turn is pushing out further galleries to feel for you. The positions of your own galleries are of course known; the positions of the enemy's can only be estimated by listening for his men at work on them.

Sometimes two galleries meet, in which case care must be taken. At least, such is the general opinion, and I give it for what it is worth.

But this is not a common occurrence, and in general the two sets of galleries meet one another like interlocking fingers. Numbers 30 and 31, for instance, of the English system, in some place where mining activity is great, will run out parallel to one another under No Man's Land and a certain distance apart. Possibly their two ends may each be fifty yards in front of our trenches. Between those two galleries is a German gallery, with its end possibly nearer our trenches than that fifty yards: which gives us the simile of the interlocking fingers.

One further thing I must say before I proceed, and that is this. These galleries may be either offensive or defensive: they may be either for the purpose of doing damage to the Hun or for preventing him doing damage to you. If a gallery is offensive it is pushed on until it is under the position which it is proposed

to destroy, and is then stacked with a large and powerful charge. The damage has to be done on the surface, and therefore a great bulk of explosive is used.

But if the gallery is defensive its object is merely to prevent that offensive gallery from succeeding. In order to do this a small charge only is put in, generally called a camouflet, which, when exploded, does no damage on the surface, but, blowing sideways, wrecks the offensive gallery itself and annoys the painstaking warriors who have built it.

Which brings us to the point. 31 was a defensive gallery, comparatively short in length; 30 was an offensive one, stretching out many yards farther than 31, and designed ultimately to disintegrate a German strong point which annoyed the Feet. Between 30 and 31 lay a German shaft, and it was this which the corporal with the flattened features felt uneasy about. It still had some yards to go before it was completed, and the danger was that the Germans might discover 30, and by blowing a camouflet to wreck it, wreck also 31 on the other side.

Apologising then for this untoward digression, let us return to the doings of our friends. It was 4.30 a.m. the following morning that Strickland and Brandsby, having breakfasted in silence, mounted their bicycles and proceeded, still in silence, towards the trenches. 4.30 a.m. is a silent hour, and even the guns seemed to appreciate the fact. The morning sun was shining nicely, and the dew was glistening as it should, as our two officers pedalled up the pavé road. Everything, in fact, conspired to

cause a poetical outburst from one if not both, and it was Strickland who obliged.

"Some day," he murmured gently, "I will catch the man who made the Government bicycle."

Stand-to was over when they reached the line, and without further waste of time they crawled down the entrance of 31 shaft. For a while neither of them could see, and they waited to let their eyes get accustomed to the darkness. Then, silently, they walked forward along the gallery.

Strickland stopped at the first T-head—a little gallery running off the main one for listening purposes. Seated on some sand bags was a man with an instrument to his ears, and as the officers came behind him he looked up.

"Not a sound, sir," he whispered. "Not a sound for four 'ours. I believe they're going to blow."

Strickland nodded and took the instrument. In a warfare where everything is sound, unnecessary conversation is discouraged. For a long while he listened, and then he turned to the man.

"Where is Corporal James?" he muttered.

"Up at the 'ead, sir."

"Right. Stop here till you get further orders. I'm going up to see him."

Brandsby and he went out into the main gallery and continued along it. A man—his naked chest glistening white in the darkness—squeezed past them, carrying a sand bag of excavated earth, and him Strickland again accosted.

"Corporal, sir? Up in front," he answered, and

once more the two groped quietly forward. At length they rounded a slight bend, and in front a light was gleaming, showing up the face of the gallery. The wall of clay was sweating like a racquet-court wall will at times, and an occasional big drop of water splashed down from the roof. Six feet high, two feet six inches wide, the shaft struck dank and cold to the officers: only the man loosening the soil on the face, ceaselessly, steadily, was dripping with perspiration. His job was just to go on until he was relieved, or the corporal told him to stop; not to argue or to think what might be doing in that German gallery next door. Of course he knew; he knew as well as the officers what was feared; but he had his job, and that was that.

In another small T-head, close to the face of the gallery, sat Corporal James.

"What's the trouble, James?" whispered Strickland.

"I'm thinking we'd better clear, sir, for the time," answered the N.C.O. "I heard them, and so did Davis down t'other T-head, up till about midnight. Since then he ain't 'eard nothing, and no more 'ave I. But——" He paused and scratched his head.

"But what?" prompted Strickland.

"I can't 'elp thinking, sir, as 'ow we're very near another of their galleries, on the other side, and so does Peters there on the face."

"Another of these galleries?" queried Strickland, producing a map from his pocket and peering at it. "What makes you think so?"

"I've heard 'em, sir: 'eard 'em last night. They're rare close."

"Aye, that's so," muttered Peters, stopping in his work for a moment. "Through there, they be; I've 'eard 'em too." He put his ear against the clay in front, and while he listened no one moved. "There ain't nothing now, but I've 'eard 'em right enough."

For a short time Joe Strickland looked thoughtful and then he made up his mind. "We will clear the gallery for a little, Corporal James, and I will decide what is to be done later. You get on out, and you, too, Peters. Take Davis as well."

"Very good, sir." The men departed, and the officers were left alone.

"Don't you wait, Dick," said Strickland. "I'm just going to listen here for a bit, and see if I can hear any sounds in this new gallery they're talking about."

"Of course you won't, old boy. They're always hearing things—these heroes."

"They're both good men." Joe Strickland flattened his head against the face of the gallery. "James doesn't often make mistakes."

For probably three minutes did Strickland listen with every sense alert, while Brandsby waited behind him, leaning against the wall. And in a war where three seconds is enough to escape or run into trouble, to deal in minutes is asking for it. It was as he straightened up and prepared to follow in Corporal James's footsteps that a sudden violent upheaval shook the ground and flung him into Brandsby's arms. The whole gallery rocked, and there was a rending heavy noise. The light went out at once, and the two men staggered to their feet, clutching one another in the

inky blackness, which pressed around them so that it could almost be felt.

"My God, Dick!" cried Strickland, after the noise and the shaking had subsided. "What's happened?"

"The Lord knows," answered the other shortly; "but it's me for the shore. Have you got a match?"

There are few things so pitiful as the light of a match in a great darkness, but Strickland lit one, and holding it on a level with his face groped after Brandsby down the gallery. They had gone perhaps thirty yards round the bend when Brandsby stopped, and having felt in front of him turned sharply round. By the feeble glimmer Strickland saw his face—and it was grim and set.

"What is it, Dick?" he asked quietly.

"We're blocked; the shaft's blown in." The two officers looked at one another without speaking; each knew what it meant.

"Have you tried up at the top? There might be a way through." Strickland lit another match, and together they peered at the solid wall of earth and splintered timber that confronted them. There was no way through.

"So they did blow that camouflet," said Brandsby. "James was right. And we, old son, are buried alive. I'm thinking the boat will go without me to-morrow."

"God! Dick, I'm sorry." Strickland looked at him miserably. "If only I hadn't stopped fooling for five minutes: if only we'd gone at once——"

Brandsby took him by the arm affectionately. "The

world has always been made up of 'if onlys,' dear old boy. Don't worry yourself."

Strickland lit another match, and again examined the blown-in gallery.

"Hopeless," he muttered, "absolutely hopeless. Perhaps they'll get to us in time, Dick; James must know we are here."

"And in the meantime do you think you'd better go on burning matches?" said Brandsby. Their eyes met, and once again did each understand. Then Strickland blew out the match, and the darkness closed round them.

It is not given to Englishmen in such positions to talk much or get excited. When, humanely speaking, the end is inevitable—when everything has been tried that can be tried, and everything thought of that can be thought of, without avail—then the average Englishman sits down, and waits for it quietly. And these two were too expert at their trade not to realise that they could do nothing.

At one end of their prison was the uncut face, at the other a mass of debris, possibly thirty yards thick, where the German camouflet had wrecked the gallery. Unless, therefore, some miracle happened, they would in the course of a few hours die of suffocation. And they knew it. . . .

"Have you a revolver, Joe?" Brandsby broke the long silence suddenly.

"Yes. But we'll wait till the last moment."

"Of course. But I'm glad it's there. And a cigarette, I think, as a final debauch."

Once again silence fell, to be broken half an hour later by Brandsby laughing.

"Hell! Joe, I would have loved to have seen you in that baccarat stunt."

"Yes," returned Strickland, "it was a good evening. Look here, old man, I'm going to wander along and find some sand bags. This is deuced uncomfortable, and one may as well . . ."

He groped along the gallery towards the face, with Brandsby behind him. And it was as he rounded the bend that he stopped as if he had been shot, and gripped the other's arm like a vice.

"My God!" he breathed, "look at that."

In the centre of the pitchy blackness in front was a hole through which gleamed a faint light, and on the other side of the hole they could see the outline of a German's head. He was peering through, trying to pierce the darkness and see what lay beyond; and instinctively both officers lowered their heads to cover the white patches of their faces. Then the light went out, and once again everything was black.

"Go back," whispered Strickland in Brandsby's ear, "behind the bend. And for the love of Heaven not a sound."

Cautiously they crept back, feeling their way along the timbering, and they were only just in time. Barely had they reached the beginning of the block in the shaft when they saw a faint light flickering in the darkness near the bend—a light whose centre darted up and down the sides of the gallery, a light which must have revealed their presence had it picked them up. The

German was flashing a torch through the hole, and only the bend in the gallery had saved them. Then that light too was extinguished, and, after a few seconds, they heard an unmistakable noise from the darkness in front.

"He's widening the hole," whispered Brandsby, "and then, my son, he's going to explore. What price us?"

Strickland was whistling noiselessly under his breath. "Damned sight more expensive than we were before, honey boy. Gee! this is going to be fun." He started whistling again. "James was right," he muttered reflectively, "and that camouflet must have caused a subsidence in front."

"Yes, confound it," said Brandsby; "but my leave-boat still seems a bit hazy. Instead of dying of suffocation, we become prisoners. And from what I've heard I don't want to become a prisoner."

"Never meet trouble half way, Dick, my boy," chuckled Strickland. "The Lord will provide; and in the meantime we will help Him. Ssh——"

Once again the light was flashing in front of them, and there came a cautious shuffling as the German scrambled through the hole.

"Up to the bend, Dick," whispered Strickland. "We must catch him as he turns the light along this arm."

"And then?" Joe Strickland heard the half-breathed question behind him.

"In silence," he muttered grimly. "I'll do it."

They crept along the fifteen yards to the bend, which showed up clearly in the flickering light from the

other way, and then they waited. They heard the heavy breathing of the German as he approached them; they watched the light growing stronger and stronger. Then it went out again: he was evidently going to round the actual bend in darkness. Tensely they waited, and then Brandsby heard a scuffle in front of him. There was a gurgling noise and a boot hit the timbering hollowly. Then there was the sound of a blow, a short, stifled grunt, and the noise of a heavy body being cautiously laid down. Then silence——

“Where are you, Joe?” he whispered into the darkness. “All right?”

“Quite,” gasped Strickland, “but he got me in the wind. Was there much noise?”

“Practically none. Is he dead?”

“Very,” Strickland grunted. “Feel for his legs, Dick, and cart him along. He may have a pal, and we don’t want him blocking up the road.”

So they carried him back to the block, and only when they got him there did they dare to flash for a second on their burden the torch which Strickland had picked up. And he was very dead, even as Joe Strickland had said. . . .

He thoughtfully pulled out the knife and wiped it; then he turned to Brandsby.

“So far, so good, old dear. But the situation is still, in official parlance, a little obscure. We cannot remain here like Horatius, slaughtering the German army by individuals.”

“And if we go forward,” returned the other grimly, “the German army will slaughter us by individuals.”

"It looks like it, Dick, I must admit." Strickland grinned gently to himself in the darkness. "'You've had a raw deal, I know—but don't squeal. Buck up. Do your damndest, and fight,'" he quoted softly. Then he fell to whistling again, while the body of the German twitched and heaved as it lay. . . .

"Great Scott, Dick!" he whispered suddenly. "I've got it. The only chance. We've got to find another Hun."

"Not much difficulty about that," grunted Brandsby. "Go through into their gallery, and you'll find hundreds of 'em when you get to their trenches."

"Yes, Dick, but he's got to be a dead Hun," returned Strickland. "Like this one. If we arrive in their lines in our own uniform we shan't be popular. If we arrive in theirs and it's dark, you might catch your boat."

Brandsby was silent. "It's death if we're caught, Joe," he said after a moment.

"Hell take it, man. I'm thinking there ain't many insurance companies would regard your life as a good one at the present moment, any way. Here we are with a dead Fritz, and sooner or later we must go or starve to death. And when they find we've killed him —well, you know the Hun."

"Bravely spoken, old soul." Brandsby was beginning to feel enthusiastic. "Though at the moment——"

"Ist es du, Fritz?" A sudden horse whisper came from close to, and Brandsby stiffened where he stood. There was a cautious movement at his side; somebody brushed against him and stumbled. "Mein Gott!" He

heard the exclamation, and the next instant he heard Strickland's whisper.

"Where is he, Dick. Get him for God's sake."

Brandsby's hand shot out, and in a second he was fighting for his life. He felt a hand come at his face; he felt an arm come round his neck, while he fumbled himself for the German's throat. He got a grip, but the pressure of the German's hand under his jaw forcing his head back nearly broke his neck. With his feet braced against the wall, he put forward every ounce of his strength, but still the pressure on his neck did not relax. He squeezed the throat of his antagonist convulsively, but he knew that it was only a question of time, before . . . What the devil was Strickland doing? Why didn't he help?

The thoughts were racing through his brain as he swayed backwards and forwards, and almost as if in answer Strickland took the risk. He flashed his torch on the struggling pair, and then he struck. . . .

In the brief second of light Brandsby saw the distorted furious face of the German, snarling and venomous; he saw Strickland's knife flash; he felt the blow go home. And then the pressure on his neck relaxed, and with a dull thud the German collapsed at his feet.

"Pull yourself together, Dick." Through the pounding of his heart he heard Strickland's voice. "There may be another; I'm going to the bend."

"Gradually his breathing became normal again, and he steadied down. The dead German still lay against his legs, and with an uncontrollable shudder he rolled the body over.

Then he heard Strickland's voice again in his ear.

"I don't hear a sound, Dick; I guess it's now or never. I'll take the big one, and you take the first."

And once more did Brandsby shudder . . . uncontrollably.

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I wish I knew more about the eight hours which elapsed after two men in dirty German uniforms, one of which was stained and torn in front and the other stained and torn behind, squeezed through a hole in the bowels of the earth and found themselves in the German galleries. It was two p.m. when they did it; it was ten p.m. when they were next heard of; and I cannot help thinking that it was a crowded period.

When two lone men are lying doggo, lost in inky darkness; when they are both dressed as Germans and neither can speak a word of the lingo; when it's certain death to make a mistake, and it's merely a fluke if you don't, there is an excuse if nerves get a little jangled. And yet Brandsby swears—when he mentions the matter at all—that Joe Strickland chuckled so continually throughout the afternoon that he was in mortal dread of being discovered; while Strickland swears that Dick Brandsby's ceaseless conversation on the matter of leave so unnerved him that on several occasions he thought of stunning him to ensure silence.

Apparently they were not much disturbed. Once some one came past the T-head where they were crouching, and turning his torch on them came in and commenced a little playful badinage. Possibly it was

the lack of response that made him look a little closer; anyway, as Strickland put it, it was all very unfortunate. He had said "Nein" twice, and Brandsby to make sure had remarked, "Yah." Then they just caught him in time as he was fading away, and Brandsby produced some morphia tablets.

"Bye-bye, baby, on the tree top," crooned the irrepressible Joe, forcing a young handful down the unwilling throat of the Hun. "Tickle his larynx, Dick," he murmured, "and mind he don't bite."

And the only thing which gives them any speculation is whether eight tablets were enough, a point which causes the medical profession to grin—noncommittally.

At eight o'clock they emerged and sought the entrance shaft.

"Pray the Powers, Dick, it's in the front line," remarked Strickland; "and for Heaven's sake—whatever happens—keep your mouth shut and don't swear."

"Yah," grunted Brandsby. "Likewise Nein. Let's get on with it."

Luck was with them. The shaft came up into the front line, and as they clambered out into the night they found the trench deserted. From round the next traverse they heard voices, and the next moment a machine gun started firing from the same place. Of course Joe Strickland was mad—he always has been and always will be—but the maddest thing he ever did, he did then. Instead of going the other way to the tock-tock of that machine gun, he slouched round the traverse towards it. Brandsby couldn't stop him,

so Brandsby had to follow. At least, so Brandsby says, though Joe accuses him of egging him on.

There were two machine gunners hating, distinctly bored with the entertainment, and for a little while two dissolute looking ruffians watched them: ruffians clad in German uniforms of which one was stained and torn in front, and the other was stained and torn behind.

“Yah and likewise Nein,” grunted Brandsby once again. “Let’s get on with it.”

“I insist,” remarked Joe, when they had finished, “on taking this machine gun away. It will do as a table centre.”

“Right,” returned Brandsby. “But if I’m going to catch my boat, we must be going—at once.”

A quarter of an hour later a perplexed platoon commander found himself confronted by two large Huns carrying a machine gun, and guarded closely by a fierce looking lance-corporal with a bayonet.

“Two deserters, sir,” he reported. “Shall I take them to ‘ead-quarters?”

“Do you speak English?” The subaltern looked fierce.

“Yah and likewise Nein,” said Brandsby. “And if I miss my boat, young fellow me lad, may the Lord have mercy upon you.”

“Great Scott!” gasped the subaltern. “What damned insolence.”

“Cheese it!” said the lance-corporal. “Quick march —yer blighters.”

It was just as well I happened to be at Headquarters when the party arrived.

"Two Germans, who say they're English," cried the Colonel. "Hi, you! get out of this dugout, you swab."

We looked up to see one of the revolting ruffians peering in at the door. He had a machine gun under his arm, and was grinning. Then he saw me, and he grinned still more."

"The champagne was good, the caviare was excellent; but the baccarat, I grieve to say, was poor," he murmured gently.

"Good Lord! Joe!" I gasped. "I've already written a letter stating how gallantly you died."

"I'll take it, old dear," said the voice of Dick Brandsby, "by the leave boat to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI

THE BOOBY-TRAP

THE trouble is that in War retribution so rarely comes on the man who deserves it. The thing is such an impersonal affair: shells, trench mortars, and rifle bullets slay or miss impartially, and there are so many pawns the less to carry on the good work. Even the bayonet cannot be said to settle any long-standing feud: the gentleman who dies and the gentleman who kills him are really complete strangers. Very annoyed with one another undoubtedly; but there is no question of the grievance being an old one.

And so, when some act of poetic justice is done, it is apt to impress itself forcibly on the memory. They are very rare, those acts: opportunities are few and far between. But sometimes they do, and . . . However, this was the way of one such occasion.

The name of the village is immaterial. It lies in the country evacuated by the Hun during February and March of 1917, and it is not yet marked on the small-scale maps. For the beginning of the affair one must go back to a certain night in March, twenty-one days after the Germans had gone. They had left it, as they left most of the villages in that district,

destroyed but not gutted. The trees were cut, the little bits of garden were ruined, and the inhabitants bore in their eyes the hopeless despair, the frozen apathy, of those who have been down into the pit. Old and decrepit—for of their children none save babies remained—they sat about round the doors of their ruined houses, hardly speaking, just watching and wondering. To them had come the desolation of War, in full measure pressed down and running over, and the poor old tired brains could scarcely grasp it. The fruit of years, a whole life's work gone—finished; and no one to build it up again. Just them and a few little children—and desolation. Old men would mutter of *soixante-dix*: old wives would shake their heads, wiping their eyes furtively with their aprons: the babies would stare solemnly and fearfully at the khaki soldiers who had replaced the field grey. For the spirit of Death does not leave those who live with it in a moment. . . .

Now, in this particular village, on the day in question, were the headquarters of two battalions of infantry. The battalions in question were the Royal Loamshires and the South Devons, and from time immemorial the Loamshires and the South Devons had been friends. In the days before the war this friendship manifested itself in many ways, which it were, perhaps, indiscreet to mention. There was the occasion, for instance, when a battalion of the Loamshires, homeward bound after many years abroad, stopped for the night at a certain port of call where a battalion

of the South Devons had its temporary residence. And there was a dinner to mark the happy occasion.

It has been handed on, the account of that dinner, in the archives of both these famous regiments. The unfortunate mishap which caused a distinguished general, specially invited for the occasion, to be greeted with an over-ripe melon in the chest just as he entered the ante-room; the sudden disappearance of the visiting colonel as he was making his fourth speech owing to his being torpedoed by an enterprising officer under the table; the celebrated feat of a subaltern who rode his bicycle five times round the billiard-table while other enthusiasts tried to poke him off with cues—all these and many like bonds to friendship occurred that night and on other gala occasions.

So it is not surprising that such a regimental tradition, founded and cemented in times of peace, should endure in the stress of war, and be passed on to the Service battalions for guidance and future action. Owing to circumstances beyond our control, ripe melons and billiard-tables are no longer available; but much may be done in the local estaminet where the omelette is good and the red wine better—where Madame's coffee is superb and the Benedictine comforting. Moreover, the two battalions with which we are concerned were quite alive to that fact.

Their friendship, however, did not prevent the really serious matters of life being taken with due solemnity. When a move was contemplated, the rival billeting officers became for the time sworn enemies. They vied with one another in lying and contumely

to obtain the best accommodation for their own people, and the state of the score at the time showed that the South Devons were two up. That last point had rankled dreadfully with Finlayson, of the Loamshires: he swore that it was entirely due to the Town Mayor of the place where it occurred being soft in the head: he swore—many things, but the fact remained he was two down. And so when he discovered the battalion's destination, and further elicited from the Staff captain that they might be there anything from one hour to four days—the Staff captain disliked being a false prophet—he again swore. He swore a mighty vow that if Tremayne, of the South Devons, again did him down in the race for billets—which, in this case, were likely to prove even more sketchy than usual—thereby making the score three up, he personally would murder him with his own hand. Then he went and dined with him and discussed "Blighty."

By what vile deceit he succeeded is neither here nor there. All that is known officially is that Tremayne approached the village some half an hour after Finlayson had arrived, and that he looked thoughtful. Occasionally his lips moved—it is to be assumed in silent prayer; occasionally he raised a protesting hand to heaven and jabbered feverishly. He was met on the outskirts by Finlayson, smoking a fat cigar and smiling offensively.

"Good ride, dear old boy? I'm afraid you'll find the billeting accommodation a bit limited."

Tremayne dismounted in silence. "James," he remarked, slowly, "I wouldn't have believed it of you.

After all these years, to treat me thus—me, your almost brother! Why, you damned old scoundrel! . . .”

Finlayson held up a protesting hand. “This language grieves me to the quick, Peter. And the score is now one.”

They stopped in front of the only decent-looking house in the village, and Tremayne inspected it with a professional eye. “Two windows, no door, a leaking roof. Great Scott! Old boy, I suppose that is where we’ve got to go?”

But Finlayson was not to be drawn. “Not so, Peter,” he answered; “that is where we *have* gone. Yours is far worse—just down the road here. You haven’t got a window at all!”

“Do you really mean this is the next best?” Tremayne demanded, when he had fully explored the second selection down the road. “The bally place is a series of holes indifferently held together by plaster!”

“I’ve had a good look round, and you won’t find anything better.” Finlayson gently fell through the wall he was leaning against and swore, while Tremayne pondered pessimistically. Under the rules of the game they did one another down only in so far as to who got the first pick. After that the second would be chosen by the conqueror with punctilious care and held against all comers till his rival should arrive.

“I would like,” murmured Tremayne, when the other emerged from the debris, “to catch the Hun that did this.”

"We have got a kitchen of sorts," spluttered Finlayson, at length, "so you'd better all lunch with us."

And this occurred on the twentieth day after the Germans had gone. On the twenty-first the two battalions were still there. The Staff captain had arrived—principally to find how the score stood—and had left again. The sapper commanding the field company had arrived ostensibly to find if he could help anybody—in reality, to cadge lunch. The men, strolling aimlessly about, were fraternising with the inhabitants; and over the village there brooded an air of peace. The guns were more or less silent, and not too near; the aeroplanes seemed to be taking a day off, when—of a sudden, it occurred.

A rumbling, shaking roar; a great sheet of flame, and a belching cloud of dust; a rending sort of crash, as timbers and walls were torn asunder; the sound as of a mighty hailstorm, as bricks and rubble came raining down into the street; and it was over. The headquarters of the Royal Loamshires had ceased to exist. The house had disappeared, and in its place there hung a thick cloud of acrid smoke.

Mortimer, the C.O. of the South Devons, who was just preparing for his afternoon siesta, dashed into the road, colliding with his adjutant and Tremayne.

"What the devil was that?" he cried, only to stop abruptly and stare at the slowly-drifting pall of smoke. "My God! What's happened?"

From all directions men had come into the street, out of houses and barns, to see what had occurred. There had been no whine of a big shell; in the sky

above there was no sign of an aeroplane; and yet a house had suddenly disappeared, and bits of it were still coming down, hitting the ground with a vicious thud.

Tremayne was the first to recover himself and walk up the village street towards the scene of the disaster. The roof had been completely blown off, and of the outside walls nothing except a few jagged splinters remained. A great mass of broken bricks and rubble blocked the near side of the road, filling the bottom story of the house; and, even as he approached, a big lump of brickwork broke off from the top of a still standing corner and narrowly escaped braining him as it fell.

But this was no time to worry about trifles of that sort. Only half an hour previously had he been lunching there with Finlayson and the C.O. and adjutant of the Loamshires. The doctor had been there, and the interpreter, and two or three other pals. Only, as I say, that had been half an hour ago.

Tremayne clambered up over the heap of debris, and almost at once he saw what caused him to curse savagely—an arm stuck out from the top. He hurled away the bricks which covered the rest from view and recognised what he found by the badges on the uniform; it was the doctor. Then he cursed again and turned to the colonel, who was standing in the road behind.

“We want a fatigue-party, sir,” he said. “I’ve found the doctor, and I’m afraid they’re all in here, buried.”

The colonel nodded, and gave a brief order to his adjutant. Then he turned to the field company officer beside him. "What the devil do you think did it?" he asked.

"No shell, no aeroplane; it can only have been one thing." The sapper officer thoughtfully studied the wreckage. "No shell except the very biggest could have made such a mess, and every one would have heard it coming. No aeroplane bomb could have done it either. The Huns, before they left, laid a delay-action mine under the house, and it's just gone off."

"But it's twenty days, my dear chap!" objected Tremayne, who had joined them and heard the last remark.

"With a little ingenuity you could arrange a delay-action mine for twenty-one weeks," returned the engineer. "A question of acid eating through wire —connection being made when the wire severs. That's only one of many ways, and the time would depend entirely on the strength of the acid and the thickness of the wire. They knew this village would be occupied; they knew that that house, being the best available, would be occupied by an officers' mess. And the swine have drawn a winner."

In silence they watched the salvage operations, which were being directed by the adjutant.

"Just to think of the rotten luck of the thing!" burst out Tremayne suddenly. "Poor old Jimmy Finlayson—so damned pleased at having got the bulge on me and got this house. And now this happens! By Jove! There is the dear chap now!"

He went to help two of the men who were carrying into the road all that was left of Finlayson, billeting officer of the Royal Loamshires.

"Carefully, boys," said Tremayne. "Lay him down there beside the doctor." For a while he looked at his dead friend in silence, and then he bent down and covered up his face with a handkerchief. "If," he remarked quietly to the sapper officer, "I was ever privileged to meet the man who ordered that mine to be laid, he would die—nastily. Unfortunately, those things don't happen except in stories."

"No," replied the sapper. "I'm afraid they don't."

Now we come to what happened on the twenty-second day in that little village in the evacuated area. The ball was started rolling during a stroll which Tremayne and the adjutant took before lunch. To all outward appearance the village was normal again; tragedies, however sudden, lose much of their sting when they happen in the Land of the Great Tragedy. At intervals heaps of brickwork from the tottering walls slithered down on the pavé below, raising a little cloud of dust; at intervals some old peasant would look with quavering eyes at the ruin by the corner and mumble foolishly to his wife. To them it was all part and parcel of the whole scheme of things—just one more of the upheavals in which they had lived for the past two years. Stray limbers still clattered down the street; limbers whose drivers never turned their heads to look at the heap of rubbish as they passed it. Similar heaps were too common to excite even the

most casual remark. Lorries jolted on their way unheeding; despatch-riders, in their khaki overalls, rushed past on bumping motor-bicycles; the normal life of France six miles behind the line, which must not be dislocated even for a second, carried on as usual.

Tremayne and the adjutant came to the end of the village, and paused for a moment in front of the last house. In silence they glanced at the fruit-trees, each with the usual ring cut round it; with a cynical smile they noticed the little bit of garden systematically and thoroughly destroyed.

"By George," remarked the adjutant thoughtfully, "those swine are thorough! They make a business of it, at any rate. What would you give, Peter, to do this to them in Germany?"

"We will, some day." Tremayne was always an optimist. "Always provided the peace swine at home are deleted from the book of the words. But, to come to more intimate details, Ginger, this house looks to me a great deal better than the one we're in at present. It has, at any rate, a window—and a door. Let us explore."

He pushed open the gate, and, followed by the adjutant, walked into the front room. It was bare and mouldering, but the walls were intact, and so was the window.

"Not so bad!" exclaimed the adjutant. "With a fire and a tot of rum. By Jove, old boy, look at this! What about that for a mess-room?"

Tremayne peered over his shoulder as he stood in the open doorway of the room behind. It was a

typical French kitchen, with old wood rafters and big stove all complete. In the centre was a table, with four or five chairs, and the remains of a meal, covered thickly with dust, were scattered about. Some German equipment was thrown in a corner, along with a few books, and close by the door there stood several bottles of beer. The room gave the appearance of having been suddenly left. All the chairs were pushed back from the table just as they would have been had their occupants suddenly risen and not returned. The beer in the glasses was half drunk, the food on the plates was not finished; and, as a crowning touch, there hung on the wall a first-class specimen of a Prussian Guardsman's helmet.

"They seem to have left in a hurry," remarked Tremayne, after a long inspection. "And that looks to me quite a pleasing specimen of helmet."

"Which, for God's sake, don't touch!" The sudden voice from behind made him swing round, and there, framed in the doorway, stood the sapper officer. Tremayne's hand dropped to his side, and he looked at the engineer stupidly.

"What on earth do you mean, old boy?" he said at length. "It's a damned nice helmet."

"Quite too nice to have been left here, however hurried the departure," rejoined the other. "Of course I may be wrong, but you know what happened yesterday."

"Good Lord! Do you mean that this house may be mined, too?" cried the adjutant.

But the sapper took no notice. Standing on a chair,

with his cheek pressed against the wall, he was peering behind the helmet. It was hanging by the strap on a big nail, so that the bottom of the helmet was against the wall, and the top swung out about an inch from the head of the nail. For a few seconds he examined it, and then he smiled gently.

"From a professional and from an artistic point of view, I congratulate the bird who did this. By Jove, Peter, my boy, the South Devons very nearly lost their adjutant and their billeting officer this morning."

"What do you mean, sapper?" The adjutant was smoking a little faster than usual.

"That is about the best booby-trap I've heard of yet." The engineer produced a pair of wire-cutters from his pocket, and they watched him insert them carefully behind the helmet. There was a snip, and they saw him lift the helmet off gingerly. Then he got down off the chair, and laid it on the table. "Very neat—very neat, indeed!"

"What's neat?" snapped Tremayne. "You bally specialists are so confoundedly cold-blooded."

The sapper grinned.

"You see that wire sticking out of the wall there below the nail? That's the wire I cut—you can see the base end of it here made fast to the helmet. Now that helmet was hung by its strap, and its top was away from the nail. Supposing you had lifted it off, Peter, from the floor, you would have caught hold of the lower part, and in doing so would have pulled it

away from the wall. The helmet would have pivoted round the strap, and the top part would have gone nearer the wall—would have touched the nail, in fact. After that the subsequent proceedings would have interested you no more."

"You mean that the helmet touching the nail would have completed the circuit," remarked Tremayne.

"Precisely. And the quickest way at the present moment in which you could deprive his Majesty's Army of the services of three particularly brilliant officers would be to touch the nail with the end of the wire sticking out of the wall."

"Thank you; it's all very interesting." Tremayne's face was set and hard. "Why can't the damned swine fight like gentlemen?"

"For the very good reason that they don't know how a gentleman fights." The sapper rose and stretched himself. "I will just remove a little more of that wire to make things safe, and then I shall have no objection to lunching with you."

"But you aren't going to leave the place full of explosive, are you?" The adjutant paused at the door in surprise.

"My minions shall deal with the matter this afternoon," answered the engineer. "Everything is quite safe," he continued, as they passed into the street. "There's no delay action about this like yesterday. It's just a booby-trap pure and simple."

"Which unpleasantly nearly caught the booby," remarked Tremayne quietly. "It's devilish lucky, old

man, that you were going round when you were. Otherwise——”

But it was unnecessary to finish the alternative.

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Despite all assurances on the part of the engineer officer, the headquarters of the South Devons declined, as one man, to move their residence.

“It may,” remarked the C.O., “be all that you say and more, but I personally decline to chance it.”

“Right-ho, sir!” laughed the sapper. “The stuff is all removed, but if you don’t like the idea——”

“I do not!” answered the colonel firmly. “I am of a nervous disposition, and I grow more frightened daily. I refuse to place my valise in a munition works.”

It was the following morning, and the two men were standing outside the door of the South Devons’ mess.

“It’s a dirty method of fighting,” went on the C.O. after a moment. “Poor old Grayson”—he mentioned the late colonel of the Loamshires—“and Finlayson, and all those others. And yesterday, but for the grace of God, and you being there, Tre-mayne and Hugh.” He stopped, and stared thoughtfully down the road. “Hallo, some prisoners! And an officer, too. Wonder what he is?”

“I think he’s an engineer,” answered the sapper, inspecting the uniform. “Let’s ask him.”

Six shambling Huns, with a morose and scowling officer at their head, came to a halt in front of the

colonel, and the escort, a young and grinning Tommy, saluted.

"Told to bring this little bunch 'ere, sir," he remarked. "'E ain't 'arf a little pet, that there one in front."

"Told to bring them here?" said the colonel. "But they ought to go on to Brigade or Division. There's no cage here."

The Tommy scratched his head and looked blank. "This is where they said, sir," he repeated. "I don't know my way, sir, neither, not no farther . . ."

"All right, lad. I'll take them over from you. Hand them over to the sergeant-major, and the adjutant will sign your receipt."

"Come on, yer little bundles of beauty!" The Tommy sloped arms, and the party was preparing to move off, when the officer stepped forward.

All the time the colonel was speaking his eyes had been roving up and down the street of the village. Once, when he caught the sapper looking at him fixedly, he had scowled furtively and immediately turned away. He was a man of striking appearance, tall and broad, with a long red scar running across his right cheek. He seemed to be trying to hide that scar by turning up the collar of his greatcoat and getting well inside it; but whenever he moved or turned his head the top of it showed above his uniform.

"I would request," he said in a harsh voice, "to be separated from the soldiers, and sent on at once."

"You will be sent on when I wish," answered

the colonel, "and when it is convenient for me to send an escort to take you. You are an engineer officer, are you not?"

"I am; and I desire——"

But he got no further with the statement of his wishes. In speaking, he had thrown back his head, so that the whole of the scar was visible, and immediately an excited clamouring broke out in the little crowd of villagers and children which had collected. A score of fingers were pointed accusingly at the mark on his face, and everybody talked at once.

"There seems to be some slight upheaval," remarked the sapper, glancing first at the scowling officer and the six impassive soldiers behind him, and then at the gesticulating villagers. "I will elucidate."

It was not a rapid matter, that elucidation. The crowd were all very anxious to speak, and proceeded to do so at the tops of their voices and at the same time. But at last one fact emerged from the general din—a fact which caused the elucidator to become extremely thoughtful.

"They say, sir," he said, turning to the colonel, "that this officer lived in this village for nearly two months just before the Germans left. They recognise that scar."

"I don't quite see what the devil all the excitement is about, even if he did," answered the colonel. "It merely seems a strange coincidence."

"Yes. But they say he lived in the house where the Loamshires were." The two men looked at one

another, and a light dawned slowly in the colonel's face.

"The deuce, he did! And the blighter is an engineer."

"As you say—the blighter is an engineer."

They had been speaking in an undertone, but now the colonel turned to the German officer.

"They say that you were billeted in this village before you evacuated it."

"I was."

"They say, moreover, that you lived in the house up there, which you now see is a heap of bricks."

For one moment and one moment only there flashed across the German's face a look of triumph; then it resumed its look of morose sullenness.

"I was; I suppose it has since been hit by a shell."

The colonel was about to speak again when the sapper caught his arm.

"Send him away, sir!" he whispered. "Send him away, but keep him in the village for a bit. I've had a brain-storm."

For a moment the colonel hesitated.

"Didn't you see that look on the swine's face," urged the sapper, "when he saw what had happened. I know he's the man—I'm absolutely certain of it!"

"Still, what the devil can we do?" The colonel was still in doubt. "Even if he is——"

The sapper interrupted him.

"Of course we can do nothing, sir; of course not. But it would be nice to know for certain; very nice to know." He was looking straight at the Hun as

he spoke, and he was thinking of the doctor of the Loamshires. The doctor had been a great pal of his.

"Take 'em away," said the colonel to the escorting Tommy. "I'll make arrangements later."

The party moved down the street, and he turned to the sapper.

"What's in your head, old boy? I'd like to string that swab to a lamp-post; but I'd like to do lots of things I can't!"

"My dear colonel!" The other held up his hands in horror. "The idea of such a thing! He must be treated in every respect like the gallant, merry hero that he is. In—er—every respect. Good-morning, sir. I'll come and look you up in about two hours."

To say that he winked would be libellous; his eyelid fluttered slightly, but it was entirely due to the wind. So what it was that day at luncheon which caused the colonel when he had finished telling the incident to add a postscript about "Greek meeting Greek" is, I regret to state, beyond me.

The meal was hardly over when the sapper walked into the mess, to be pounced upon immediately by Peter Tremayne.

"What have you found out?" he cried. "Is that the swine who did it?"

"My dear Peter," returned the engineer, "you outrage my feelings. I have been engaged in a couple of hours of—er—quiet study. In my branch of the army, you know, continual work is . . ."

"Dry up, you damned fool." Tremayne's face was set "I'm in no mood for fooling. Is that the man who murdered Jimmy?"

"That is what I propose to find out now. Not exactly ordeal by fire, you know; but a sort of reconstruction of the crime. It might be amusing, and it will clear the air and remove doubts." The sapper lit a cigarette. "I want you to interview the prisoner, colonel, in that room in which the booby-trap was put."

The South Devons looked at him in silence.

"What's the game?" remarked the adjutant shortly.

"None. Why should there be?" He thoughtfully blew out a cloud of smoke. "I shall be there myself, and don't be surprised or—er—alarmed at anything you see me do."

"What do I say to him?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, any old thing! Ask after Hindenburg's health, and put him at his ease. I want him to think that you are using the place as your mess. I shall come in after he is in the room, and it won't take ten minutes." The sapper grinned at them gently. "Shall we proceed?"

They rose and trooped over to the house in which the sapper had found Tremayne and the adjutant the preceding day, and sat down round the table. Orders had already been sent for the prisoner, and in silence they awaited his coming.

"I see you've put the helmet back in position," said Tremayne. "I hope to Heaven you've removed the juice!"

"What do you think, papa?" laughed the sapper. "In the words of an enterprising weekly—watch that helmet!" He glanced through the window. "Here he comes. Watch him, too!"

Now there rests over the last phase of this episode of Divine retribution a certain haziness—almost, one might say, the fog of war. The Hun came into the room and, according to Tremayne, the click of his eyes as they fastened on the helmet might have been heard down the street. But let me quote that veracious raconteur, as we got it later in the oyster shop at Amiens:

"There we all were sitting round the table, pretending to toy with some remnants of bad sausage and a glass of flat beer, when in walks Master Hun with the escort behind. He looked round the room once or twice, and then he spotted the Guardsman's helmet hanging upon the wall, just as it had been the day before. He got that helmet transfixated with such a gaze that he didn't even hear the colonel's first question, and you can bet your shirt we weren't missing that loving look of his. Seen it before? Of course he'd seen it before. Why, the swine had put it there; he was the swab who'd caused all the trouble. I knew it, so did every one."

"The play sort of dragged a bit, owing to the Hun missing his cue twice in his conversation. He couldn't talk and think about that helmet at the same time, with the nice little packet of trouble which he thought was underneath the floor, and I was just on the point of batting in with a leading question or

two, when in strolls the sapper—just as if he'd never seen us before. The Hun looked at him quickly and he looked at the Hun—and somehow I don't think they liked one another very much. The doctor man in the Loamshires—Jerry Dermot—and the sapper had been great pals." Tremayne thoughtfully skewered an oyster, and contemplated it.

"However," he continued, "we were most of us wise to his game by this time, and, 'pon my soul, he acted well. Some one ought to write a play round that situation as a plot."

"Some one has," pessimistically barked an intense officer opposite, "and it's been rejected by every manager in London."

Tremayne looked offended. "Damn it! you don't know what the situation is yet."

"The point is immaterial," boomed the intense one still more pessimistically. "I, personally, have written a play round every possible and impossible situation which can or cannot occur. They have all been rejected by every manager in London. Proceed."

"He passed the time of day with the colonel, and hoped he wasn't interrupting anything official; he murmured inanities about our having a nice mess, and then—he saw the helmet. Now he was acting, and we were all acting, and it says something for our acting that the Hun never spotted us. There wasn't a man in that room who hadn't got one eye at least on that dirty Boche."

Tremayne finished his Chablis savagely.

"The colonel asked him a question and he didn't answer. He'd got his eyes set on the sapper, and he couldn't move 'em, and we watched him sweat. The sapper strolled up to that helmet, and he examined it from all angles.

"'That's a damned good helmet,' he remarked casually, 'damned good. Prussian Guard, isn't it?' He put up his hand towards it, and there was a noise like a stillborn explosion from the Hun. The sapper swung round and looked at him. 'By Jove!' he cried. 'What's the matter? You look quite faint.' Then we all looked at him openly, and the sweat was pouring off that man's face in two streams.

"'I am all right,' he said thickly; 'but I would not—I would not——' The words sort of died away in his throat, and he choked a bit.

"The scene undoubtedly has its dramatic possibilities," murmured the intense officer. "It is, I believe, an established fact that the fear of death is worse than death itself, though how the deuce anybody knows . . ." He relapsed into silence.

"We didn't rush matters," continued Tremayne. "The sapper came away from the helmet, and the sweat ceased coming away from the Hun. Then he returned again, and so did the sweat. He put up his hand and he fingered that helmet, and he talked casually while he did so. I was sorry for him really, because he missed the Hun's face. And then, at last, he started to take it down, and as he did so, with one ghastly shout of 'Don't touch!' the Hun leaped for his arm and caught it. It was really

very fine: a pretty sight. . . . Madame—encore des huitres, si'l vous plait.” Tremayne looked round the circle of faces and his eyes were gleaming. . . . “The sapper, an infuriated figure of outraged dignity: the Hun shaking like a bally jelly and still holding his arm.

“‘What the devil do you mean?’ roared the sapper. ‘Let go my arm at once, damn you!’

“The Hun mouthed and sweated, and we waited.

“‘Let me get it down for you,’ he got out at last. ‘If you could lend me a pair of wire-cutters.’ He paused, and didn’t seem to like meeting any one’s eye.

“‘May I ask,’ said the sapper, in a voice you could keep the fish on all the summer, ‘why you require wire-cutters to take down a helmet hanging on the wall?’

“‘The helmet is secured to the wall by a wire,’ stuttered the Hun. ‘You will have to cut it, and I thought you might damage it.’

“‘You know this room, then—and this helmet?’ The colonel chipped into the conversation, and you know what his orderly-room voice can be like.

“‘Yes,’ answered the German. ‘When I was here before, I used this room.’

“‘Indeed!’ remarked the colonel. ‘Well, since the officer wishes to take down the helmet for us, I see no reason against it.’

“In perfect silence the sapper produced some wire-cutters, and handed them to the Boche, who clambered on to a chair and flattened his cheek against

the wall exactly as the sapper had done the day before. And then that worthy winked at us—just once.

“‘It will help you if I pull the bottom out a bit,’ he said quietly, and we saw him do so. I put it that way because the Hun did not. That helmet only had to move an inch, but during the time it took to do it the Hun moved about ten yards. Head first he dived into the corner—straight off his chair as if it was into water. Only, as it wasn’t water but a good stone floor, he ceased to take any active interest in the proceedings for the next ten minutes.”

Tremayne lit a cigarette.

“When he came to again the helmet was lying on the floor beside him, and the wall was blank except for the nail, as it had been the whole time. He opened his eyes and peered round, and from that moment no one of us spoke a word. He saw the helmet—he looked at the wall; then he looked at us, and—understood. For a while he didn’t understand—he thought something had gone wrong with the works; but then suddenly he did. One could tell the moment when it came to him, the certainty that we had known all along; the realisation that we had watched him sweat with terror over his own dud booby-trap, and finally stun himself in the agony of his fear.”

“Did he say anything?” asked a cavalry man sitting opposite.

“Not a word. No more did we. We just watched him in silence, and after a bit he got up and tried

to pull himself together. Then he went, with the escort behind him, and that was the end of it."

Peter Tremayne got up and started to put on his British warm. I remember he paused at the door for a moment before going out.

"I once saw a man accused of cheating at cards before a lot of people—and the accusation was true. He was a decent fellow, but he was short of cash—and I have never forgotten the look in his eyes. He blew his brains out that night. I once saw a fellow at school—a great hulking blighter—who was caught stealing money red-handed. He came up before us prefects, and I have not forgotten the look in *his* eyes, either. And if you combine 'em, and multiply 'em by ten, and then do it all over again, you may have a dim idea of the look in that German's eyes just before he passed out of the picture. So long, boys; hope I've not bored you."

CHAPTER VII

THE BRIDGE

THE Brigadier-General, General Staff—hereinafter known as the B.G.G.S.—was frowning thoughtfully at the map spread out in front of him. At his side, also frowning thoughtfully, stood the Chief Engineer—hereinafter known as the C.E. From the next room came the monotonous click of typewriters; but in the room itself there was silence. In one corner at a table an intelligence officer was carefully studying an aeroplane photograph, and occasionally making alterations in a trench map as the result of his study. In another a somewhat harassed-looking colonel on the Staff was wrestling with some returns. They concerned motor lorries, or raspberry jam, or trench feet; and owing to their surpassing dullness and extreme inaccuracy, the wrestler's feelings finally culminated in a loud, explosive "Damn." After which silence reigned as before.

"That's the spot, Maitland." The B.G.G.S. leaned forward and pointed to a spot on the map with his finger. "There or thereabouts."

The C.E. studied the map in silence before answering. "It would be better to have it half a mile to

the south," he remarked at length. "The difficult question will be as usual—stores. And if we go a bit to the south, there may be some trees left in that wood which we could use."

"Well, of course, that's your palaver." The B.G.G.S. knocked his pipe out against his boot. "The approaches seem equally good in each case, and the only point that occurs to me is that a wood is an excellent thing for ranging on."

"Wherever the bridge is put," returned the Chief Engineer, "I give it about one hour before every gun in the Boche army is pooping at it. However, the main idea is quite clear: we must leave details to the man on the spot. What about a cup of tea?"

Thus, in what to the uninitiated might seem a casual and airy manner, was settled the question of The Bridge. A few minutes later the B.G.G.S., accompanied by the C.E.—no longer frowning thoughtfully—might have been seen crossing the old-fashioned cobbled street on their way to the château which served as the Corps Head-quarters Mess. Inside the office an intelligence officer still carefully studied his aeroplane photographs; a harassed colonel on the Staff said "Damn" more frequently. Moreover, the typewriters still clicked in the room next door. But there was this difference: The Bridge had been settled. . . .

And now it is necessary before proceeding farther to outline the causes which led up to the bridge. Away up in front big things were in the air. Like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, controlled by the master-brain which sat behind and moved them, great bodies of

troops were being shifted here and there. At first, to the onlooker the pattern is confused; the moves seem aimless, the pieces do not fit. But after a while things begin to grow clearer: the picture commences to stand out, the reasons are no longer obscure. Thus it is with a concentration of troops; and away in front a concentration was taking place. Already the guns were beginning to give tongue more continuously; already a presage of what was to come was in the air. Tanks were appearing and squatting in fields; lorries and Decauville railway trucks were carrying up thousands of rounds of ammunition; something was in the wind. The Boche was getting jumpy, and trying by means of continuous raids to find out whether the real something was there, or farther south, or both, or neither. And still the hand behind went on moving the pieces. . . .

That is the impersonal side of war—the intellectual side. The personal one is when you come to the pieces themselves. To each man his own responsibility: to the battalion commander his two or three hundred yards of front; to the Army Service Corps officer his twenty or thirty lorries; and, similarly, in this case, to one John McVeagh his bridge.

Not that it suddenly grew like that. John did not wake up one morning in the shell hole covered with a baby elephant,¹ and realise the fact that he was to dally with a bridge. Far from it; such momentous

¹ For the benefit of the uninitiated it may be explained that a baby elephant is a curved steel plate, and not a zoological specimen.

news arrives more slowly—through devious channels.

It started on its downward path the morning after the B.G.G.S. and the C.E. had frowned; and the first person to get it was the Commanding Royal Engineer—hereinafter known as the C.R.E.—of the division concerned.

“Good morning, Draycott.” The C.R.E. saluted the general, and sat down in his office. “There’s a matter I want to discuss with you, about this coming push. It’s the question of communications if we get our objectives.”

“They won’t be too good, sir, on my bit of the front.” The colonel was studying his map. “There’s a good deal of water in that big ravine in front of us.”

“I know. That’s the point. We’ll have to have a bridge made: a bridge capable of taking lorries.”

“Very good, sir.”

“That’s the spot,” continued the C.E. after a moment. “There or thereabouts.” He pointed to the map. “That wood might be of use—so I suggest making it fairly near. But, of course, such details must be left to the man on the spot.”

The C.R.E. got up and felt for his cigarette case. “Yes—stores will be the trouble. However, sir, I’ll see into it. As a matter of fact I was going to suggest it to you myself.”

Which may or may not have been a fact; but as a wise and far-seeing remark it leaves nothing to be desired.

The second step on the downward path occurred that

afternoon, when it passed from the C.R.E. to the Field Company Commander concerned. The main difference between that interview and the one already given is that the Field Company Commander cannot hereinafter be known by any abbreviation. He remains as he started, a Major in the Corps of Royal Engineers. The other difference is that the matter was discussed in very much greater detail; but as technical details are of all things the most tedious, it is proposed to take them as read. No man can possibly make a story out of a road bearer, much less out of a trestle leg. . . .

Thus did it get to John McVeagh—the third step downwards. And John McVeagh was a character.

"It's a bridge, is it, they're wanting," he remarked, pulling steadily at his pipe.

"Strong enough for lorries, John." The Field Company Commander applied a match to his rum with the air of a connoisseur, and having burned away the rawness added a quota of port. D'you think you could make a nice one for them?" It may have been solicitude for his rum that caused him to bend so closely over the table.

"Make a bridge!" John's tone was that of one who reasons with a child. "Losh, man, I've lived with them. For the last ten years—I've slept with them."

"Is that so, John?" The twinkle became obvious. "Then under those circumstances I think you might be able to make them a nice one. But don't forget the calculations this time."

"The palsied old son of Anak," growled John.

"Talking to me about the strength of a transom, for the load of a perambulator over a yard span."

His C.O. grinned gently and recalled the incident in question. It had been John's first claim to notoriety on joining the company, and its fame had spread. There had been a little job to do which concerned a light tramway track, laid along the ground up to the support line. Along this track trolleys were pushed nightly, with rations and bombs and stores inside, which saved large carrying parties being used. And to John had fallen the job.

In the fullness of time it was completed, and shortly afterwards various luminaries—both great and small—made a tour of inspection. As it was quite impossible to get out of the trench beside which the track ran during the day, the tour of necessity became largely a matter of faith. Nobody saw anything until they arrived at a cross-trench over which the track ran—supported on a little bridge. And by the little bridge sat John—peacefully resting.

The day was warm, the flies were plentiful, and there is no doubt that on the subject of inspections John's knowledge was not what it might be. When all is said and done, the being who inspects must say something. He probably dislikes doing so intensely; but after all—what is an inspection for? Wherefore, in the sunny silence, the greatest of the luminaries, who had previously looked it up in the book, gave tongue.

"Did you—er—make this bridge?"

John got on his feet and saluted. To be exact—he

scratched his head, which comes to the same thing.
"Which bridge, sir?"

"Which bridge? That—of course." Plentiful flies are trying to the temper.

"Bridge!" John was getting bewildered. "Oh! I just chucked a few sticks together here, sir; that's all." His tone was apologetic; he seemed not to notice the anguish on the faces of the lesser luminaries.

"D'you mean to say you haven't worked out whether it's strong enough?" John seemed utterly unconscious that he was being handed the frozen mitt.

"Worked it out?" He was still puzzled. Not this deal, sir. Out in B.C., if we want a bridge—we just put one up. It's sort of natural instinct; and they have to take a full-size engine and a load of coaches. I guess this will carry the raspberry jam all right."

As I say, he was ignorant about the procedure at inspections. There is nothing so annoying to a luminary who has come primed on a point to find it isn't needed. In fact, if dirty buttons are a great one's *bête noir*, the unit commander who omits to have one man with dirty buttons is failing in his duty. Such a lapse suppresses the fulmination, and causes irritability. Far better to get it over and have peace. . . .

And so with John. The proper procedure would have been to fumble in his pocket, at the same time murmuring, "Of course, sir; I will show you my calculations." That is the counter-offensive, and has never been known to fail. Instead of which the morning was spoiled for every one. There was nothing

more to be said—it being quite obvious to all concerned that a man who has made railway bridges can with safety be entrusted with a thing the size of a match-box to take jam in a hand trolley. But the principle remained, and even the fact that John had been ten years one of the big railway engineers in Canada, made the subsequent proceedings no less melancholy.

Which shows, as the schoolboy essayist has it, how careful one must be, and also throws a sidelight on John. . . .

However, all that concerns us here is the fact that the making of the bridge, which was one of the little pieces in the jig-saw, had been handed over to the man on the spot. It had become personal, and from that moment the bridge was John McVeagh, and John McVeagh was the bridge. And this was the way of it. . . .

Now let it be said, clearly and once for all, that this is no story with a plot. There is nothing in it about V.C.'s or widows. It is just a plain, unvarnished account of one of war's side-shows; and if there is a bit of pathos in it, there is a bit of laughter too. If it wasn't for the laughter, could the world have stood it for three long years? . . . The story, then, such as it is, is merely John. And John got annoyed that day. He said horrible things to men of great power in the land, who became excited and reasoned with him. So things in the nature of V.C.'s were off; and as he is unmarried, so were widows.

The infantry popped the parapet at eight in the morning, and, from a bit of hill behind, John watched them. For the first time in his life he got the view which the war correspondent gets—the impersonal, detached view in which the performance spreads itself out like a pageant. He watched the long lines of men walking slowly over the ground behind the reeking smoke and fumes of the creeping barrage. They seemed to be crawling, so slowly did they go. Every now and then a shell from one of our own batteries would burst amongst them; there would be a sudden ducking and scattering of the two or three pygmies close by, and then the line would close up again and go on steadily forward.

Perhaps a man here and there would fall with a queer little twitching, and would remain where he fell, a motionless brown lump in the great drab background of mud. Sometimes one of the pygmies would wave his arm in a manner which seemed meaningless, grotesque at such a distance; then he would go forward again with the other pygmies behind him and alongside. And always in front there seethed and twisted the smoke of the barrage; always the shells roared continuously overhead, like some great waterfall. . . .

A belt of something, clearly marked against the ground, began to emerge from the smoke. Torn and shattered, but still clear to the eye, the Hun wire came into sight: their front-line trench, their saps, a crater or two. They seemed deserted and dead as the barrage passed them by; and then, sud-

denly, in odd places other pigmy figures would appear. Through glasses John could see a machine gun being rushed up the side of a huge shell hole; he could see the Germans feverishly getting it into position; he could see the steady line of khaki walking towards it in ignorance.

"Look out," he howled, "in front of you, boys—mind out." Carried away by excitement he shouted advice, which might have been heard a yard away in the deafening uproar. Then he realised, and looked round self-consciously, to find that men near him were howling too. He watched the khaki wave melt away in front of the gun; he saw the still brown figures lying on the ground where a moment before they had been walking, full of life, and he cursed. Savagely and bloodily he cursed, while a great Irishman beside him half started forward, with murder in his eyes and murder in his heart. And then, suddenly, he saw a pigmy wave his hand—a pigmy away to one flank. As if by clockwork four others swung left-handed, and John roared. With his breath coming short he watched 'em, as they stalked that gun; with incoherent babblings he saw them reach the shell hole and jump in. With his glasses to his eyes he saw the scrap—snarling and shouting as he lived it himself. Only one of the Huns seemed to have any stomach for it, and he passed out five seconds after the others—on a bayonet. . . . As John McVeagh looked at the Irishman beside him, he laughed—laughed like hell. And the Irishman laughed too. . . .

Thus did the infantry pass out of sight. They crossed the ravine early in the performance—the ravine which was to be the scene of the bridge. They topped the rise in front, and they disappeared over the farther side to their final objective. And thus do they pass out of this chronicle. . . .

To John, perhaps, had he the telling of it, there would be an epic in every road bearer, a poem in every joist. After all it was his child, and the shrapnel that took three sappers as they were lashing a transom to one of the trestle legs meant a lot at the time. It was becoming personal—that's all. . . . Personal to John. . . . And it's then a man begins to see red, even if it's only inanimate material he has to contend with. . . .

The first human touch was the lead driver of the pontoon wagon. This pontoon itself had been unloaded, and on the wagon had been stacked various ropes and tackles required in the construction of the bridge. John watched the wagon coming at a canter down the so-called track; then, with a lurch, it swung left-handed and came bumping and crashing towards him. The shelling was not heavy at the time; in fact, he hoped to get well on with the job before it became so. But over the water—one never knows. He could see the lead driver's face—Purvis, a boy from the North; he could see Betty and Mary, the two stocky little mares who meant more to Purvis than father or mother, straining at the traces; he was just holding up his hand as a signal to halt,

when with a sudden screech it came. John ducked. He thought it was on top of him—but it wasn't. It took the lead pair, and it blew them to pieces; it took Purvis, and it cut him in two. Quite quickly—in a second—it happened, and by the time the smoke had cleared away the other two drivers—more frightened than hurt—had sorted themselves out of the debris.

"Cast off those traces," ordered John quietly, "and pull up over there. When you're unloaded go back and get the first lot of wood."

He laid a quieting hand on the neck of the off wheeler, who was still snorting and plunging, and looked quickly at the two drivers. They were both a little dazed, and the centre lead of the six-horse team—now promoted to lead in a four-horse—was mumbling foolishly. Considering that half a minute before he had escaped death by a miracle it was not to be wondered at; but—there was the bridge. And to John sucking his pipe stolidly, the bridge was the only thing which mattered.

"Don't forget, my lads," he said suddenly, "you've now got to do as much with four horses as you were going to do with six. So—move."

Not sympathetic—perhaps not kind—but profoundly wise. There's nothing like high-pressure action for the jumpy nerve or the sinking stomach; and when there's something doing the dead must bury their dead. . . .

"Ten casualties up in the wood, sir; but we've got four good trunks for legs."

John, watching the empty wagon going back for

more stores at a hand-gallop, turned to his sergeant, who had come up behind him.

"Good. We'll do it with two trestles." They moved away together to the bottom of the ravine, where two parties of sappers were working. The sweat was pouring off them as they heaved the baulks into position, ready for the N.C.O. in charge of each group to give them the necessary measurements before lashing. Gradually the shelling was increasing, and though blind and undirected at present, John's pipe was shifting from one side to the other of his mouth. It was a trick of his when he was worried, and it was the only way he ever showed it. But a heavy trestle bridge cannot be put up without men, and there had already been ten casualties in the wood.

A 5.9 burst in the ravine fifty yards away, and John bowed gracefully as a fragment whizzed past his head. Then there came another and yet another, and John's pipe shifted a little more rapidly.

"They've got the range," he muttered; "let's hope to God they don't get the direction. What's the matter, Jackson?"

A brawny-looking North countryman was feeling his leg, and whispering a benediction.

"A bit of that last blinking shell, sir," he answered. He twisted a handkerchief round his thigh, and continued whispering. Then he turned savagely on the man next him. "Two frapping turns, you perishing flat-foot. You ain't fit to tie up a pound o' margarine in a butter queue, you lop-eared son . . ."

But thereafter he became technical, so let us leave him.

It was just two hours before the first trestle was ready for hoisting into position, and during the last part of the time things had become quieter. That it would not last John knew only too well; but he had hopes of getting the bridge fixed, at any rate temporarily, before the storm broke out again.

"All together now—heave." The men standing round the trestle lifted it a foot in the right direction. "Again so—heave." Sweating and cursing they got the bottoms of the legs in their proper places, and the guys fixed to the tops of the legs for hauling the trestle upright.

"Pay out on that back guy." John's voice sounded clear across on the other side, and even as he spoke, with a vicious crack an H.E. shrapnel burst just above them. It killed two men and wounded four, and clean as a knife it cut both back guys. With a snap they parted, and the trestle crashed forwards on to the side near John, crushing a man's leg as it fell.

It was a moment calling for stern restraint, and it was unfortunate that the Staff Captain of the Brigade should have selected it to approach with some pack mules. It was still more unfortunate that he should have greeted John with the statement that he had been told the bridge was ready, and why the devil wasn't it? He was harassed, that Staff Captain; and he'd had a trying time. Moreover his face

was red with heat and exertion. Two men were fixing new back guys as he spoke, and for the moment John was free. What he said is not officially recorded, which is perhaps as well; but it is written in the annals of John's Field Company. Let it merely be stated that even the man whose leg was crushed laughed, while the Staff Captain turned a brilliant puce and jibbered. A crump droned wearily down near by, and the Staff Captain ducked; but John did not pause. He was still speaking when his adversary stood upright again. He continued speaking long after the Staff Captain had departed and he was officially under arrest. In fact, it took his Company Commander quite a long time to smooth matters over.

"He said he wanted a monkey to drive piles with," spluttered the offended one, "and asked me what my terms were."

"Too bad." The Field Company Commander concealed a smile.

"He never stopped," went on the other, "and he never repeated himself."

"I'll bet he didn't." John's C.O. spoke feelingly.

"I thought the bridge was made. Damn it all, I'd been told so. And it's subversive of discipline to have one's face compared to a blood orange gone bad—in front of the men."

But, I digress. All that came after, and ended happily in an impromptu dinner, where John and the Staff Captain, having looked on the wine that is red and the Benedictine that is yellow, sang to-

gether on the table. It cannot be called a duet, as both were singing different songs; but the result was excellent, which is all that matters.

And so let us return to the bridge. Three hours had gone by since the new back guys had been fixed and the first trestle hoisted into position. The second was in its place, and between them ran the roadway. Dotted about in various places little groups of men were lashing and hammering, while underneath, in the ravine below them, lay a dozen motionless figures—sprawling uncouthly, with staring, steadfast eyes. They seemed to be waiting for the last bolt to be driven in, which would justify their sacrifice. The bridge had been their job, and they had been the price. . . .

So far John had not been touched, and at the moment he was standing with his sergeant, who with one arm broken with a lump of shell and a bloody bandage round his head, had refused to quit till the job was done.

"Have a nip of this, Palmer," John handed the sergeant his flask. "You'd better go, man. You're looking damned dicky."

"I'll see it through, sir." The N.C.O. raised the flask to his lips, and then, slowly, his arm dropped to his side and he remained staring upwards. "There's a Hun, sir, and he's blinking low."

John looked up, and even as he did so, there came an ominous swishing through the air. It was far more of a whistle than the average shell makes, and it was quite unmistakable.

"Duck, boys!" As one man they threw themselves on their faces, and the next instant the bomb exploded. It missed the bridge and hit the ground about ten yards away. And ten yards is unpleasantly close when you're above the burst. Some heavy roadway limber, which was in position but not yet bolted down, was hurled into the ravine below, with three men who were lying on it. The whole structure rocked dizzily, while the trestle nearest to the bomb looked as if it had been peppered with a charge of gigantic duck shot. The fumes drifted over them, stifling and choking; but long before they had gone John was out investigating the damage.

"Curse the fellow!" he grunted savagely. "I hope that's his last."

Below, one of the men was painfully dragging himself clear of a baulk of wood which had fallen on his chest, while the other two, half stunned, were gazing dizzily about them.

"Get a move on, boys," he shouted. "The swab's gone now."

"But he's coming back, sir," said a corporal beside him. "Look at him."

Uncomprehendingly, for a moment they watched the machine. It had gone on for a bit, and then, banking steeply, had turned round.

"Gawd! wot's 'e up to?" A sapper, with his mouth open, stared foolishly at the Hun airman. "'E's going to ram us."

Like a huge bird the machine was diving straight

at them. They could see the pilot's face, silhouetted against the sky; they could see his goggles and his leather jacket.

R-r-r-r-rip. Some men, with a queer spinning motion, threw up their hands and fell downwards on to the ground below—killed instantaneously by the aeroplane's machine-gun. And then, when it seemed a certainty that the machine must crash into the bridge, when John McVeagh had bitten the stem of his pipe clean through, and had instinctively braced his shoulders to meet the impact of the machine, the unexpected happened. As suddenly as it had come—it was gone. It shot past them with the roar of an express train not ten feet above their heads, and rose into the air again. A thing of seconds that swoop—of fractions of seconds: one of the innovations of modern war. . . .

"I am not certain," murmured John, looking at his pipe and then at the machine rapidly disappearing into the distance, "but I think that operation is known as zooming. I am almost tempted to say Good-bye-ee."

But it was not to be Good-bye-ee, though for the airman's sake it would perhaps have been as well. There are stringent orders, it is true, on the subject of firing with rifles at aeroplanes. The damage to the aeroplane is generally so small that a hailstorm of spent rifle bullets falling in odd places behind the line is hardly regarded as good value. But John was no stickler for etiquette, and when therefore he saw

that airman turning once again, he did not stop to think twice.

"Rifles," he roared, "and get down in the ditch. When he starts going upwards fire at his head."

They jumped, they fell, they swarmed into the ditch, and they stood with their backs to the side from which the Hun was coming. They heard him coming louder and louder; then with a swish and a roar he was down on the bridge again—machine gun going full blast. He rose, and for a moment, clearly outlined, they saw his head, and forty odd rifles cracked. Thirty-seven bullets found their resting-place in peaceful fields behind. One apparently struck a hairy horse of doubtful temper, who had recently developed mange, and thereby saved the vet. much trouble. One apparently caused an abrasion of the finger to an N.C.O. in the Army Pay Department, which was duly reported as a wound, and caused a sensation. But one most certainly passed through the Hun pilot's head.

They saw him fall forward: they saw the machine sway drunkenly. And then—suddenly—it crashed, and burst into flames; while twisting and turning a little black figure kept pace with it as it fell to the ground.

They found the pilot later in the old No Man's Land, and his eyes were staring too, just like the eyes of the men he'd killed.

"One can't help wondering, sir," said the sergeant to John as they looked at him, "what the devil they say to one another when they first meet. . . ."

And that was the last adventure at the bridge. That evening, over the track that had been prepared, there came limbered wagons and mules, infantry and machine gunners. They came to the bridge, and they passed over it, and they vanished into the gloom beyond. To them it was just *a* bridge; but to John McVeagh—it was just *his* bridge. In time to come lorries and guys would use it; later, when the line pushed on, it would fall out of use and the timbers would rot away.

Sightseers will look at it perhaps when the war is over—just a few crumbling bits of decaying wood.

A bridge—an old bridge—used in an advance. That's all. But it was one of the pieces in the jig-saw.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ONLY WAY

NOSEY, I shall very probably talk to you to-night. I have a feeling that I am in my most brilliant form." The speaker—by name Hugh Lethbridge—sat down on his blanket and contemplated the other occupant of the perforated sieve which formed their abode for the night. It could hardly be called a room, as a room is generally suspected of having four walls and a ceiling: this, on the contrary, boasted of three has-beens and a hole.

"Hinspired by the Ritz, I don't think," returned the other morosely. "Look 'ere, mate, if you moves two foot to the right, you'll cover that there blinking crack with yer back, and keep the breeze out."

"But how nice, Nosey, for my back," Lethbridge laughed. "By the way, any mail in?"

"Yus; three for you. Wot's that thing there on the back of the henvelope?" He passed over the letters to his companion as he spoke, and Lethbridge glanced at them casually.

"That!" He laughed again. "That, my worthy warrior, is a coronet. It means that the writer is a tit, nob, or similar what-not."

"Wot—one of the haristocracy? Blime, mate, 'ave you been working the lonely soldier stunt with one of the nibs?"

Nosey gazed at him in undisguised admiration.

"Put it that way if you like, Nosey." Lethbridge was opening his mail. "It doesn't much matter these days how you put it. To paraphrase a certain bard, my friend—'Sound walls are more than coronets, and holeless socks than Norman blood.' "

For a while there was silence, only broken by Nosey gently sucking his teeth as he pondered this last great thought.

"Yes"—Lethbridge folded up his letters and put them in his pocket—"the war has changed a lot of things. Frankly, Nosey, if I had been asked in July 1914 whether I thought it likely that I should to-day be sitting in a mansion of this sort discussing philosophy with you, I should have been inclined to say no."

"I dunna abaht yer philosophy," answered the other; "my philosophy is when the 'ell I'm a-going to get back to me barrer in White chapel. 'Fish! fine fried fish—and chips—all 'ot!'" His voice rose as he chanted his war-cry, and he spat reflectively.

"Do you want to get back to your barrow in White-chapel?" Lethbridge looked at his companion curiously.

"Do I want to?" Nosey's tone was frankly amazed. "Lumme, mate, you can search me. Do I want to?" Once again he spat accurately and with great vehemence. Then suddenly—"But not

till we've beat these; not till we've beat the — perishers off the faice of the herth." His language was of Whitechapel Whitechapelly; his sentiments might have inspired bishops . . . but haven't.

Lethbridge laughed and lit a cigarette. "Nosey, he said after a moment's silence, "you interest me. Do you like this game out here?"

"Do I like it?" Nosey scratched his head. "'Ere, chuck us one of them fags; they smells good. I dunno as 'ow I likes it much, wot with messing about with ration parties and R.E. fatigues; but I wouldn't be out of it. Strite, I wouldn't. It sort o' gets 'old of one, don't it?"

"But do you know what you're out here for?" persisted the other.

"Yus, mate. Braive little Belgium—Hi don't think." Nosey grinned broadly. "Shall I tell you what we're out 'ere for—to do down the — Boche; that's what we're out 'ere for. 'E hasked for it, and now he's ruddy well got it—the perisher."

"And what made you come in to start with, Nosey?"

"Gaw lumme—I dunno." Again he thoughtfully scratched his head. "I didn't think abaht it. I just come. The old country was shouting for men, and so I left the old gal to run the barrer and joined up. I dunno why."

"You didn't think about it, and you just came. I did think about it, and—here we both are." Lethbridge blew out a cloud of smoke. "Seems all right, don't it, Nosey?"

"And wot did you think about it?" His companion was mildly interested.

"Do you know what an idealist is, Nosey?" asked Lethbridge.

"Yus—not 'alf. A man wot starts selling ginger-beer to the working man without no gin in it."

"Your definition might well be worse." Hugh Lethbridge missed a stout rodent by a bare inch. "But though I have never in my wildest moments attempted to sell ginger-beer to the working man, with or without gin, I was nevertheless an idealist. As a matter of fact, I am now."

"It don't pay, mate; it don't pay. Cash down is my terms at the barrer, and a man can fill his belly. But no tick."

"You elaborate your definition, Nosey, I see. Does Mrs. Nosey agree with the no-tick principle?"

"You bet yer sweet life. There hain't no flies on Marier."

Lethbridge accepted this zoological assertion calmly; he seemed to be following a train of thought of his own.

"An idealist, Nosey, and a cynical one at that. The beauty of things as they might be"—Lethbridge was speaking dreamily—"the hideous drabness of things as they were. One sees both; one saw both before the war; and the futility of combining the two, the idiocy of kicking against the pricks, made one laugh and weep. Then—the war: the final magnificent climax of every influence that makes for unhappiness in life."

"Yus, I don't expect we shall get much happiness out of this little bundle of trouble," answered Nosey. "Still, mate, you never knows: it might clear the hair like; and it 'as made me and the likes of me hunderstand you and the likes of you as we never did before."

"Perhaps so; but will that understanding last—will it bear the test of time? We're all striving, my friend, for material success, the little 'brief authority'; and when we get it it's Dead Sea fruit."

"Yus, and when yer ruddy well don't get it, hit's worse than Dead Sea fruit. It's a rotten marrer, then, mate; you can taise it from me."

"Doesn't that show we're on the wrong lines? Either way it's a frost; and the fool who said, 'God's in His heaven; all's well with the world,' spoke according to his folly."

"Yus, mate, it do seem as if Gawd weren't taking much notice just at present." Nosey's tone was thoughtful. "And yet, I dunno; I can't complain. Wot wiv the old gal's separation hallowance, and one thing and another, we ain't doing too bad."

Lethbridge smiled. "This is only the climax, my friend: the logical climax to which we have been drifting for years. Mankind has been riding for a fall; it's got it. I'll tell you a little story of a man who sat on the top of a cliff, from which he contemplated the struggles of humanity in the sea below.

"Detached from them he watched with keen interest the goals towards which they strove; and as is ever the way with those who watch from a distance

he failed to see the practical difficulties which beset their paths. The man swimming out to sea, in his effort to reach a distant boat, has but a limited horizon. Each wave he meets is one more thing to be got over; and from its crest he may or may not see his goal. At times he is in the bottom of a mighty trough—at times completely submerged; but he goes on. . . . Perhaps he reaches it; perhaps he drowns; but he has tried—and the measure of his success is the measure of his strength. . . .

“If only the being on the top of the cliff had been able to direct him, that time he got in the choppy water and went far out of his course . . . But to the detached one there was only a head bobbing aimlessly in the sea. . . .

“If only the man with the big horizon—the man on the cliff—had worked in conjunction with the struggling swimmer the boat might have been reached. But between them was an unbridged gulf: the gulf which has always separated the doer from the thinker, the practical man from the theorist. And yet they could help each other so much. . . .

“There you have it: the idealist, philosopher, dreamer on the top; the realist, man of action, doer in the sea. And the only connecting link was the Church, which the man on the cliff didn’t believe in, and the man in the sea hadn’t time for. What’s the cure, Nosey?”

“Look ’ere, mate; you’re the man on the cliff, I’m the bloke in the sea.” Nosey emphasised his point with two fingers on a horny palm. “Wot I says to

you is this. If you wants to 'elp us, there's one thing you've got to be bloody sure about: that's our standard. See—our limit. What you blokes do is this, and the women is the worst: you come down and you mess us about. Tells us wot we ought to like, an' wot we hought not; wot we ought to do, and wot we hought not, when the two standards is totally different—yours and hours. Me and my ole gal now, we've lived together for ten years, but I hain't married to 'er. We don't want no perishing devil dodger gabbling stuff hover us. An' we're 'appy too, mate—don't you make no ruddy error: 'appier'n a lot of them that is married proper. But, Lor' luv yer, a laidy o' sorts come round the other day and tried to get the ole gal to promise to marry me when I comes 'ome. 'Make an 'onest woman of her,' she says; and when Liza tells 'er to go to 'ell she gets quite 'uffy. I puts it to you, mate, hain't it better to live with a woman you loves, than marry a woman yer don't? That's the standard we knows; only you blokes on the cliff don't see it."

"Not all of us, Nosey; not all of us. But some do." Lethbridge sat forward with his arms round his knees. "What you've said is only one point in the big scheme, though it's a large point. All sex questions fill a disproportionate amount of the horizon in life, and we people on the cliff would be very blind if we did not know it. It was a sex question that sent me back to the top, when I came down into the sea, and really swam for the first time, Nosey."

"Yus, the women do the 'ell of a lot of mischief; but they've the goods." Nosey thoughtfully removed

a cigarette from Hugh's case. "Prefer Ogden's myself, but these hain't bad." He lit it and blew out a cloud of smoke. "Get messed up wiv some one's girl?" he asked genially.

"No; not exactly that." Lethbridge smiled. "Jess and I—she's my cocker spaniel, Nosey—came down from our cliff once to contest the constituency of Puddleton."

"Blimey! a Hem-P." Nosey gazed at him in wonder. "One of them blokes that makes speeches and reads 'em hin the papers the next day."

"You've got it. We decided to become M.P.'s, Jess and I. It took us some time to make up our minds; but finally one afternoon we went into the study to make a decision. To Jess the only thing that mattered was that the day was not to be spent indoors.

"Barking excitedly she rushed to the open windows which led into the garden, and through which the moors, glinting purple and gold in the sunlight, stretched away to the hills in the horizon. Another slobber—another rush; and then, having told me the great news, she sat down in the middle of the room and watched me expectantly. She had done her part of the business—it only remained for me to do mine; and my failure to immediately comply with the course of action which was so obviously the correct one brought a pensive look to the big brown eyes. To Jess, it was incomprehensible that her adored master should remain standing by the big roll-top desk in the window, staring out into the world beyond, into freedom and rabbits and smells both good and bad, and not imme-

diately go forth and explore these wonders with her. But then, it has puzzled wiser heads than a cocker spaniel's, why what is so obvious to us is not quite so obvious to the other man. . . .”

“Yer right, mate.” Nosey sighed profoundly. “That there blinking ration fatigue, I got caught for last night. . . . And I told the sergeant it weren’t my turn.”

Lethbridge laughed. “I told her that, as best I could,” he said. “I told her that we could settle it best with the smell of the wild coming in through the window, and the heat haze shimmering away there on the gorse: this great question of coming off the cliff. Have you ever noticed, Nosey, that heather is lovely in theory but damned unpleasant in practice?”

“Can’t say I ’ave, mate,” Nosey ruminated. “I don’t ’old with ’eather. Fish is my line.”

“It’s unpleasant in practice, Nosey, because you flush far too many flies and other abominations when you come in contact with it. Much insect life will worry you before you get to the birds; which, incidentally, is why it’s so like politics.” It was a dreadful eye-opener, Nosey, that descent to materialism. My principal supporter was the Bishop of Slushton; and for days Mrs. Bishop inflicted upon my defenceless head her husband’s schemes for the amelioration of the conditions of the Hottentots.

“A pontifical old ass, that husband of hers, Nosey, and he knew it. Moreover he knew I knew it. Utterly out of touch with life as it is; concerned only with impossible schemes for the undesired alteration of

life as it isn't. And of such is the Church largely composed.

"Jess didn't realise at the time what a nasty thing it is to contest a constituency; in fact, she rather liked Puddleton if I remember aright. She found a variety of unpleasant things there, which she kindly gave me; but they were nothing to what I found, Nosey. The rottenness of the constituents of Puddleton was past belief; and the knavery of my agent was the result of the system; and I remember his fury when I threatened to throw my hand in if he so much as hinted at some unfortunate domestic trouble of my hated rival! I told you it was sex, Nosey. This abominable ruffian, so my agent affirmed, was positively living with a woman who was not his wife: his only excuse being that his wife was mentally afflicted, so that he was unable to live with her. Think of it, Nosey—the villainy of it! And when I found it *had* got about, in spite of what I told that agent, and announced on the platform at the meeting presided over by Sir Ebenezer Johnson—sometime Marmalade King—and now pillar of State and country gentleman, that my rival's action was perfectly justified, which was more than could be said for the majority of those present, as they had no similar excuse—yes, when I said that, my damned agent was quite annoyed. A nasty fellow that man, who had spent his life nosing in unsavoury details that had nothing to do with him. And such is Party Politics. . . ."

Lethbridge thoughtfully filled his pipe and reached for the matches.

"Yes, we came down off the cliff that time and got into the sea, Jess and I. Then having lost the seat by an overwhelming majority we went back again, and watched the struggles of the successful candidate. His maiden speech—an illuminating masterpiece on the subject of the treatment of Polynesian aborigines—sounded, I believe, worse than it read; and he sank into profound obscurity. Strange in a way too, because he knew nothing about Polynesian aborigines. But there you are, Nosey; you never can tell—you never can tell. . . ."

"Which is just what I says, mate: yer standard was different. Hif you wants to succeed, you must 'ave the same standard as them around you. It hain't no good trying to go against people; you must run wiv them."

"And the point is, whether success is worth it at the price."

"You're going a'head too far, mate. Us blokes 'ave got to succeed; us blokes 'ave got to work and struggle to live. We ain't come to no ruddy millennium yet, where never you gets a 'arp and a skinful of beer 'anging on a tree. I hain't got no word to say against yer theories, hexcept that they hain't practical. For all the dreaming and 'ot air that was coughed up by them as should know about war being himpossible, 'ere we are, mate, up to our pluvvy necks in the mud, and popping the parapet day after to-morrer. 'Ow could you 'ave prevented this war with your theories? It don't matter a damn wot hactually started it, but

the 'Un is out to prove 'e's the Lord 'Igh Hemperor of the World, and we're hout to prove 'e ain't."

"That the future of the world does not belong to the blonde beast," Lethbridge smiled cynically. "We saw the maelstrom from the cliff, Nosey, and from the cliff it seemed ridiculous that the swimmers should not be able to miss it. But then, from the cliff it was impossible to tell the strength of the cross currents. From the cliff it seemed that two of the competitors deliberately, and with malice aforethought, swam into that maelstrom, and that the others were sucked there against their will. That's what it looked like from the cliff; and to the unbiassed onlooker the cream of the jest is that the whole blessed lot are in there now, and every one of them is claiming God as his especial property, in this war of right, against might."

"Yus; the Halmighty must be 'aving a busy time these days." Nosey spat reflectively.

"Lord, what a throw back it is, Nosey!" burst out Hugh suddenly, "this killing business. Can any solution obtained at such a cost be worth while?"

"In course it can, mate." Nosey's tone was immeasurably scornful. "I tells you this 'ere war will make the Hempire wot it never was before—a real thing to hus blokes at 'ome. Hits taught hus the meaning of the word, and made us realise wot we never heven thought of before. Hits enlarged our minds, broken down class 'atred amongst them has 'as fought, and made hus all think about the possibilities of hemigration."

"At the cost of a few million lives."

"Yer can't 'ave big results without big costs. Hand wot I says is, that seeing as we didn't ask for it, the costs hain't our fault, hand the results is our reward."

"And what good has the Empire ever done you, Nosey," said Lethbridge quietly.

"None. I hadmits it; for I never 'eard nothing about it. They was ashamed of it, before the war they was, at 'ome: hashamed of it, or so hit seemed. Now we knows; and all them great lands—Haustralia, Canada, New Zealand—mean something to us. There's jobs there, mate, for me and the likes o' me; and if I 'adn't got me barrer I'd 'ook it to one of them with the old gal."

For a while there was silence, and Lethbridge listened to the dull crash of a shell in the town nearby.

"You're optimistic, Nosey: more optimistic than I am," he said at length. "We're all in the soup, and there we'll remain till we've struggled out. What will be the result then, when the hands across the table and the Huns have gone down? God knows. Whether it will have been worth it or not, God knows. Whether we shall get any good from the evil, God knows. But we're in it *now*; and that is all that matters *now*. Once you're committed to a course of action, be you man or nation, even to the idealist there is only one way of tackling it, and that's bald-headed. There's no good waiting and wondering, thinking and theorising. That may come later. But just now, if we're

to get the swimmer out of the whirlpool, we've got to get into the sea and swim like hell."

"'Ere, 'ere, mate. Cut the cackle and get to the 'osses. And there's honly one way of getting to the 'osses; and we both knows it." Nosey grinned gently. "Yus; we both knows it. But wot I do want to know is this: When we 'ave beaten the 'Un—shall I be allowed to pass the time of day with young John Barton—'im that was working the next pitch to me in Whitechapel? That young hangel, mate, pinched 'alf me takings one night, which was hall in the matter of business, and being my fault, I says no more. What I do say is that 'e 'as no call to become a conscientious hobjector." Nosey spat disgustedly. "Conscience! that there perisher ain't got enough conscience to make a chicken flea blush. I'll make the swine hobject when I get's at 'im, if they puts me in quod for it. Lumme, 'ere's the rum. "He drained his tot, and smacked his lips. "Yer 'ealth, matey. Wot I says is this: let's get on with the ruddy war. We're the blighters as is doing it, and when hits hover'll be time enough to loose the gas. Let's get it finished, an' get 'ome. We didn't start it; but we're a-going to finish it."

"My sentiments to a T, Nosey." Lethbridge raised his rum to his lips. "I looks towards you. The cliff and the sea have joined in earnest."

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"Winkles! Winkles! and the ruddy pin for you, me beauty." Nosey thoughtfully impaled a stout Hun on his bayonet and passed on. "Come hon, mate; look

aht—love yer, that was pretty shooting. Another blinking second, and the perisher would 'ave 'ad you."

Lethbridge cautiously rounded a traverse, and instantly stabbed viciously.

"Hanother of 'em. Gawd! ain't we the fairy queens of the show." Nosey dropped two bombs down a dugout. "Noises hoff," he remarked genially; "business hin the wings."

"Well, that bit's mopped up, Nosey," said Hugh, wiping his forehead. "What shall we do now?"

"Get on with it, mate; find some more, and get hon with the ruddy war. This is the only way to win it, and Hi wants to get back to me barrer. 'Fish!—fine fried fish—and chips. All 'ot!' 'Ullo! Percival, 'oo are you a-looking for?" A diminutive Hun materialised from nowhere with his hands up. "Ain't he a picture. That way, little man, and keep yer ruddy 'ands above yer 'ed, or me gun might go hoff."

"The only way to win it, Nosey," Lethbridge laughed and looked at his dripping bayonet. "You're right, my friend, you're right; but I can't help thinking of the time when a certain idealist sat on the cliffs and wondered how he could best help. Mark over. Crump."

CHAPTER IX

THE EDUCATION OF BUNNY SMITH

I

IN the year of grace 1914, in the month of July, Mr. John Smith, known to his intimates by the more homely title of Bunny, occupied the proud position of clerk at the Murchester branch of the London and South-Western Bank. There were many others who shared his onerous labours, and who regarded life from a similar point of view, one which may be briefly summed up as free from all cares and responsibilities save that of avoiding the tired but searching eye of Mr. Johnson, the chief cashier, when they were engaged in a surreptitious game of halfpenny nap.

At five o'clock or thereabouts the ledgers would be shut with a bang, and a crowd of Bunny Smiths would emerge with a sigh of relief into the sleepy High Street, across which the shadow of the great cathedral would already be creeping. Until nine the next morning they were free to do what they liked, and were there not two picture palaces and an excellent bar at the County Hotel? A game of tennis before dinner was always a possibility, a knock at the nets if of cricketing bent, or a ramble to the polo

ground to watch a chukker or two if the cavalry regiment quartered in Murchester happened to be playing. In fact, there were a variety of things which filled in time after work was done, and Bunny Smith was quite contented with his lot.

Occasionally vague thoughts would float through his mind that the plums of life were a little unequally divided, but these were cobwebs of fancy disappearing almost as soon as they had brushed across his imagination. There was a cavalry subaltern, for instance, who used to come down to the bank sometimes on Friday to draw pay for the men. He was a long, thin sort of person with an eyeglass and a powerful two-seated car, which would draw up to the pavement in sight of Bunny, who sat next to the window. The officer's name was Draycott—Lord Charles Draycott—and he was popularly reputed to have fifty thousand a year. And at times it *did* strike Bunny that it was hard luck that the long, thin person should be a Lord with fifty thousand a year, while he was just Bunny with fifty.

But it never got any further than that; it never really made the boy discontented. He envied him vaguely, but it never came to any real feeling of personal injustice. Though speaking quite familiarly of him to a friend of his, an articled clerk at the local solicitor's, though mentioning casually that Draycott had been in at the bank again that morning, the officer seemed so completely a bird of passage from another world that comparison was ridiculous.

Then, again, there was the feeling about the Army

in Murchester, and Bunny, who lived at home with his father, had been brought up to it. Confronted point-blank, he would have indignantly denied it; he would have considered himself sufficiently a man of the world to have discarded such fallacies as this absurd—perhaps prejudice is too strong a word—this absurd idea about soldiers. But it must be admitted that the excitement attendant upon the entertainments, which formed such a large feature in the lives of the ecclesiastical clique, proved so nerve-shattering to the gallant horse soldiers that they found it imperative to fall back on the quiet pastimes of hunting and polo. And since these latter pursuits left the clerics stone cold, constant meetings between the officers and the leaders of Murchester society were not the order of the day. It was a pity; so much can be done by getting to know people—so many misconceptions can be swept away.

But, pity or not, it was so; and as Murchester existed only by reason of its cathedral, and, moreover, knew it, it was only natural that its inhabitants should follow the cathedral set, and tend to regard the soldiers as unsociable men of a somewhat idle type. And, in parenthesis, in the year of grace 1914 this idea was not confined to Murchester. . . .

But I am digressing from Bunny. Had he been asked if he was happy during that period of his life when he dabbled in other people's pass-books, he would have answered with a doubtful "Yes." The doubt would have been caused by the fact that he had never really thought about the matter at all, and hav-

ing concluded that he was not actively unhappy the affirmative would have been the answer. Had the questioner gone a little further into the matter; had he suggested that to a healthy youngster the life prospects of a bank clerk were not such as to make him light-headed with excitement; had he suggested that anything, even the old hackneyed going away to sea notion or becoming a mechanic in an aerodrome would be preferable to existing conditions, he would immediately have been brought to a full stop by the dead wall of conventionality. Custom, convention, that clogging soul-fettering thing which had the country wrapped in its toils, would have rebounded on that questioner, would have suffocated him, would have defeated him.

Think of the households that formed by far the larger proportion—save for the labouring class proper—of the towns of our country: think of the homes of the Bunny Smiths. In and around London they swarmed, that great body of steady, quiet, plodding nonentities; in every town in the country they lived their aimless lives and died their aimless deaths. To them their work was not aimless; each in his own little sphere buzzed happily for a space and then handed the reins over to his son. For so had their fathers done to them in days gone by, and the thought of breaking away from accepted tradition never entered their minds.

To some of them, as they grew older, there came at times a vague discontent, a self-pity for the futility of their existence. The great world, so far remote,

with its teeming life, would shoot out an occasional tentacle and ruffle the peaceful surface of the pool. Some public man, a name to most of them, but a schoolfellow of the local lawyer, would make a speech, and an empire would listen.

"I always thought him a bit of an ass at school." The lawyer with immense care would pot the pink in the evening game of snooker. "Still, there must have been something in him after all. . . ."

And being human, as he walked home that evening to his small, pleasant house on the London road, the comparison would strike him—a comparison which sometimes hurt.

"I wouldn't change with him. I'm happier as I am." Perhaps—but was it a *man's* happiness? . . .

And as it was for the fathers, so it was for the sons. England was overcrowded with men for whom there was no job; no job, that is, which genteel convention would allow them to take. A few, a very few, broke away, and relatives regarded them tearfully as lost souls; the vast majority sank into the torpid pool of utter mediocrity, and sleep enwrapped them.

At times they woke up and felt the injustice of it; at times they felt that life did not hold much to make things worth while. They struggled and wriggled like a hooked fish, and their struggles and wriggles gradually became more feeble. The line was too strong, the line of insular narrow-mindedness and convention, which held them body and soul.

To a few the cynicism of realising their utter futility

was an ever-present scourge, but to the majority a kindly God granted a special dispensation of self-complacency. Only it could not have gone on much longer. The realisation that there were other nations in the world—as good as if not better than, ourselves, and that the national pastime of slumber was not the best method of dealing with them, was beginning to strike home. The certainty that unless some effort was made to free the youth of England from the enervating sluggish atmosphere into which it had drifted, that youth would die, was beginning to be regarded, not as the wild vaporising of a fanatic, but as a cold, sober fact. How long would have elapsed before some action was taken, what that action would have been, whether it would have come in time—God knows. Perhaps mercifully He has saved us the bother of wondering. He has permitted another solution. And the interesting point of speculation is whether the solution will be successful. . . .

In the year of grace, 1915, in the month of July, Second Lieutenant John Smith, of the Royal Rutlands—known to his intimates by the more homely title of Bunny—stood on the mat in front of his Company Commander. I use the phrase in its military sense; “the mat” does not apply to a Turkish carpet of great age, it signifies a state of affairs sometimes referred to by the vulgar phrase of “getting it in the neck.” And at the moment Bunny was getting it in the neck and most other portions of his anatomy.

Again I speak metaphorically; it was not a boxing competition.

"I am told, Mr. Smith," remarked the Company Commander, Major Fortescue, "that last night when we got in here your platoon couldn't find its billets, that the men had no rum or bovril, that they wandered about all the night trying to find somewhere to sleep, and that ultimately they had to get what cover they could under the transport. I should like to hear what you have to say about it."

His tone implied that state of mind which actuates the usual demand for "reasons in writing." No exalted one ever asks for reasons in writing without the certain knowledge that there are no reasons to write, and the Company Commander expressed in no unmistakable fashion that there was nothing to say about it, and if there were it would be ill-advised to say it. Had Bunny been older and more experienced he would have recognised this fact; he would have said straight out: "Sir, I am very sorry. It was inexcusable on my part, but I chanced my arm and left it to the platoon sergeant. It shall not occur again."

But Bunny was not old, and his experience of France consisted of one week. So he argued. Now, to argue at any time with a senior officer on parade, even when one is in the right, is foolish, but to argue when one is in the wrong is the act of a triple damned fool. Moreover, he argued in an aggrieved tone, and men have been hung for less.

"I saw the quartermaster, sir," he began with some warmth, "and he told me all the billets were fixed up.

He showed me the direction of my platoon's, and I told Sergeant Jones to take the men there. Then I went to look for my own, and I was so frightfully wet that I took off my boots. Then my servant brought me a cup of tea, and I asked him if the men were all right. He said they were, so I went to bed."

The expression on his face was one of pained surprise; he exuded that air of self-righteousness which says, "What the devil more could I have done?" Outside a lorry was rumbling and lurching over the *pavé* road, and Bunny watched it as it passed the window. He was feeling just a trifle like a martyr, and his whole bearing revealed the fact. Only in France a week; three days in the trenches in a sticky and unhealthy part of the line, during which time he considered he had acquitted himself with some credit, and then to be cursed because his confounded sergeant had failed to find the billets for his platoon. It was, to his mind at the moment, honestly unfair. It was no pose; he had, during a particularly warm five minutes on the preceding day, borne himself well in new and very trying circumstances; he had heard one of his men remark to another, after it was over, that the new bloke wasn't windy, thank Gawd, and he had swelled with that comfortable and pleasing feeling which comes to anyone who has made good in a dangerous spot, once it is all over. In fact, Bunny considered himself the complete officer, and, what is more, a jolly good one at that.

"Sit down, Smith." The Major's voice cut into his thoughts. "Sit down in that chair, and have a smoke.

I want to talk to you, and put one or two things in front of you which I think may be new."

A little surprised at the sudden change in the other man's voice, Bunny did as he was told. He pulled out his case and lit a cigarette, watching his senior's face as he did so. He was looking thoughtfully out of the window, and seemed to be deliberating as to how he would begin. The short-clipped moustache, the firm strong chin, and the four medals on his coat struck the boy for the first time; and for the first time he realised that this man was not the type who would have found fault with him for no adequate reason. Of a sudden he began to feel very small, very young, very ignorant; his self-complacency was oozing away; he wondered if he was such a damned fine fellow after all. And while he wondered, all unconscious of the fact that in the same room with him was a teacher who had learned from the Book of Life and Death, that teacher set in order his thoughts the better to teach this youngster so utterly ignorant of his duties, so absolutely unmindful of his responsibilities. He had taught the lesson many times before, he was destined to teach it many times again—the lesson of the Army. And the principal charm of it all lies in the fact that in no two cases is the syllabus quite the same. It is such an intensely individual—such an intensely human lesson, and all must learn it. . . .

"What were you before the war, Smith?" He turned suddenly to his subaltern, and his tone was very friendly.

"I was a clerk in a bank, sir, at Murchester."

"Oh, yes, I know the place. Fine cathedral, isn't there, and quite a good cavalry station?" He paused and knocked out his pipe. "Ever been away from Murchester much?"

"No, sir, except for ten days' or so holiday each year."

"You've never had anybody to think of except yourself, I take it? I mean, you aren't married, and your salary has just been yours to spend as you like? When your work at the bank was done you were free for the day, and were your own master—what?"

"Yes, sir." Bunny's tone was a little doubtful. "Of course, I lived with my father, and . . ."

"What is your father?" The Major apparently did not notice the pause.

"He is a solicitor, sir, in Murchester, and we're a pretty large family." Then, as an afterthought, he added: "My mother has been dead some years."

"I see." His company officer quietly started to fill his pipe. "Did you like your job at the bank?"

"Oh! I don't know, sir," answered Bunny. "I don't think I ever thought about it much. It was pretty dull at times, but there was nothing else for me to do. Sometimes one wanted to do things, and to see places, but—it wasn't much use wanting."

"Not much use!" The unconscious weariness in the boy's tone told its own tale to the man who watched him. "Not much use!" The old, old cry of the lotus eater; the watchword of the sleepers who watched the doers. And in so many cases sleep was not theirs by

preference. They only wanted a little help—a small start to put them on the right track.

To each man his own life—to fail or to succeed; and the result—a little better or a little worse than he found it—to his sons. That is the law; but it goes not with the consumption of lotus. Sleep is not its foundation; it is the law of the workers. . . .

"When I first sent for you this morning," remarked his Company Commander, suddenly breaking the silence, "I was extremely angry with you; when you made your excuse I was more so. I, too, last night was wet to the skin, and I slept in a cowshed. The room which you had was mine, but you had had a very bad doing up the line, you were new to the game and young, so I gave orders for you to be taken there." He held up his hand to check Bunny's half-uttered thanks. "No, don't thank me; I am merely telling you now in order to point a moral.

"On your own showing, Smith, you lived a life before this war absolutely free from all responsibility. You had your dreams, you had your hopes—occasionally you longed for something different. But circumstances, a lack of money, a lack of initiative decreed that you and thousands like you should remain in that quiet, placid existence which formed your surroundings, that you should live in it and ultimately die in it. There was never anything big enough to shake you out of the commonplace rut, until this war came along, which has picked you up, taken you by the scruff of the neck, and dropped you into a state of

affairs of which even now you personally are profoundly ignorant."

He glanced at his subaltern smoking in the chair, and the look he saw in the boy's face caused him to smile slightly.

"Perhaps you think that you are not profoundly ignorant?" His eyes were twinkling as he spoke. "That you have been blooded, eh—in that little show at Caterpillar Corner?"

"I didn't know you knew about it, sir," stammered Bunny.

"My dear boy, it's my job to know everything that concerns my company, just as it's *your* job, Smith, to know everything that concerns your platoon."

Bunny Smith reddened and shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Don't you understand, boy, that the scrap the other evening was nothing, nothing—at all. You did well, but you did no more than I expect of any N.C.O. or private in my company. That isn't what an officer is for. I suppose you thought when you got your commission that the job of a regimental officer was an easy one, that any damn fool could do it—what?"

"I—er—don't know that I ever thought much about it, sir," answered Bunny.

"Nor did anyone else think about it, Smith, before the war, and only a few of them do now until they try. The old Regular Army, which contained the model by which the regimental officer to-day must mould himself, was regarded by most of the world's great thinkers as the happy hunting-ground of men

whose hobbies in life were sport and adultery. And the regimental officer was above trying to refute the fallacy to a crowd of beings who took not the slightest interest in his existence." The speaker smiled cynically.

"However, that is neither here nor there. Now that the Army is no longer a thing apart from the nation, now that the Army, in fact, *is* the nation, the nation has an opportunity of adjusting its point of view. And you, and fellows like you, are a very large part of the nation; fellows who have never before had anyone to think of except themselves, fellows who have merely been individuals, with an individual's outlook.

"I want you to realise, Smith, that that state of affairs has ceased, absolutely and finally. When you took a commission you took a dam sight more than a piece of paper. You definitely took a responsibility on yourself, the responsibility of forty men's lives, comfort, and well-being. And you've got to fill the bill. Your success in filling it will not only be your measure of success as an officer, it will be the measure of the change in you after the war.

"You must get rid once and for all of the idea that in peace an officer has got nothing to do, and that in war anyone can do it. You've got to get into your head straight away the rock bottom of the regimental officer, without which he is not worth a curse—the knowing of his men. The end-all and be-all of one's life is knowledge of human nature; men and the ways of men are one's only study. And when you've studied

your men and their ways, and what they will do and how to make them do it; when you can hold them and lead them and get the last half-ounce out of them, and then keep them willing after that—well, then you can call yourself a good regimental officer. But you won't do it, my lad, by going to sleep in your billet while your platoon is wandering about in the pouring rain looking for a place to sleep which you ought to have found for them."

"I'm sorry, sir; I didn't think of it that way before." Bunny Smith looked his Company Commander straight in the face, with a new look in his eyes.

"My dear boy, if I thought for one moment that you had, you'd have had to be revived with brandy by the time I'd finished with you. All I do say is—think in future. I know it was thoughtlessness and ignorance on your part; try not to do it again."

"I won't do it again, sir." Bunny's tone was emphatic.

Fortescue smiled. "Perhaps not that particular crime, but there are very few of us who can work out our salvation after only one slip. It's the principle of responsibility that I want you to get into your head, that responsibility which bands men together into willing co-operation. It was the keynote of the old Army—co-operation; it will have to be the keynote of the new ones if we are going to pull through. The pity of it is that it is the one thing conspicuous by its absence in civil life."

He lit a cigarette and picked up his hat and gloves.

"I think—a little lunch."

II

Thus ended Bunny Smith's first telling-off, administered by a man of kindly understanding. It might have been a cursing administered by a fool, in which case the education which I shall endeavour to portray would not have advanced—it would have gone back. More, it might have been arrested for good. To curse laziness is right; to curse ignorance—excusable ignorance—or thoughtlessness which is the result of that ignorance, is the act of a mere fool. And Bunny was very ignorant. . . .

When ten days before he had waited for the boat-train he had treated the matter more or less as a joke, and a joke which had all the element of novelty in it. His father, good man and true, had walked up and down the platform with him at Victoria, while Matilda, his sister, with her best hat donned for the occasion, had walked with them, alternating between a strong desire to cry and the proud certainty that the right to prefix Second Lieutenant to her brother's name settled the fate of Prussia.

And Bunny himself—well, he felt much like a boy going to school for the first time. There was a peculiar sinking in the pit of his stomach, an inarticulate wish that the engine would break down, and the actual moment of going would be put off. He had found home dull in the past; his bank life seemed very remote, very indistinct; still, it had been his life, his whole life. Murchester struck him as something very

much more desirable than it had ever seemed before; old Johnson, the bank, home and peace, were slipping away from him; and, in their place—the unknown.

"Good-bye, old man." His father was speaking through the window. "Write when you can."

"Of course I will, dad." His voice was gruff, and his father seemed a little indistinct.

"God bless you, my boy." The train began to move gently, and for one wild moment Bunny almost hurled himself out of the carriage, the instinct to cling on to his father, to Matilda, to the last remaining tie of the old order was so strong. Then he sat back in his seat, and through a strange blur he watched his father walk slowly away with Matilda clinging to his arm. The new order had come; he had answered the call to the younger generation. But he didn't realise that at the moment; he only saw that his father, with Matilda close by him, seemed of a sudden very old, and that his face was working strangely.

Thus had Bunny Smith left the things he knew of, and stepped into an unknown world. The trouble was that he had not the slightest idea how unknown it was.

When he reviewed what his Company Commander had said he knew that he had, in the bottom of his heart, always considered an officer's job an easy one; that any damn fool could do it. He knew that it had been—and was even now—a prevalent idea amongst numbers of people at home.

It had seemed to Bunny that the amount of brain required to learn the rudiments of bombing, the in-

tricacies of forming fours, and all the other usual stock-in-trade of a second lieutenant of feet was not very great; that the truly material side of his new job was but little harder and a great deal less wearisome than informing Farmer Giles that his account was ten pounds seven shillings and one penny overdrawn. And if Bunny, when his thoughts had run on these lines, had been careful to keep the word "material" before him, he would not have been much adrift in his calculations. But he didn't, and that, and that alone, is where his ignorance lay; that and that alone is where lies the ignorance of thousands of others. To them soldiering is just a basely material trade, the trade of killing, and there is nothing else in it. Moreover, there is no money in it, and since its objects are frankly destructive and not constructive, and carry with them a maximum of suffering and discomfort, what good can it possibly do to the world at large? It is a necessity in this case they admit, but it is a vile necessity; in the future, it must no longer be a necessity. On that point it were futile to argue—it is more than likely they are right; but with regard to the idea that soldiering is a basely material trade, whose sole object is killing, *and nothing more*, only those who have tried it can know the absurdity. It is equivalent to saying that there is nothing more in boxing than knowing where to hit a man; that there is nothing more in cricket than hitting a ball to the boundary. And it is even more grotesque than either of those examples, which leave out all mention of preliminary training, for this reason. The

training for boxing is entirely material, so, to a large extent, is the making of a cricketer, whereas the training of a soldier—a good soldier—is, to a very large extent, spiritual. Not religious—certainly not, though a good man may make a good soldier; but spiritual as opposed to material, moral as opposed to physical. And it is that side of a soldier's training, infinitely the most important and difficult, which many people forget all about.

This war is a hideous thing; there can be but one hope, and that, that there should never be another. That is the ideal to which every thinking man must look; but in the looking, let him remember that it is an ideal. The man on top of the cliff whose eyes are fixed on the horizon is apt to overlook the breakers below, and it is those breakers which are our practical concern. And so to those whose one obsession is the prevention of the catastrophe again, because of its unredeemed vileness, I would point out one all-important fact. Things can never be the same again; for good or ill the civilian life of the Empire has been changed—changed by war. And unless we take account of that change, unless we keep alive the improvement in the young manhood, we shall be back where we were before. And there will be with us the added bitterness of men who have tasted something better. Which way lies revolution. For there has been an improvement—a wonderful improvement. Whether it is worth the price is neither here nor there—for the price had to be paid. There was no choice about that—save that of permanent dishonour. And

surely the more extortionate the price, the greater should be our care in salving the goods. . . .

III

Now Bunny Smith had, at any rate, one attribute, which helped him in the new life to which he had come. He was naturally of a cheerful disposition, and though not even his staunchest friend could have called him good-looking, he had that honest, open, grinning countenance which cheers those who contemplate it, which made many of those things that come at the beginning of an officer's education much easier for his teacher and himself.

Take a small case. It had not ever occurred to Bunny in the past that because the man next door did not wear a coat on a cold morning he was in any way called on to follow his example—in which surmise he was perfectly correct. Where life is individual the wearing or leaving off of any form of garment is purely a matter of individual taste. And so, quite unthinkingly, he appeared one morning on parade with a new and expensive British warm overcoat adorning his person while all the men were uncloaked.

A little thing, you say! Quite so—very little; but it's the little things which count almost more than the big ones when dealing with human nature, and it is understanding and sympathy with the little things which makes the good regimental officer. It shows a kindly consideration for the feelings of others, without which no man can hope to be a leader. It shows that

a man is playing for the side—not for himself. It is just a question of unselfishness and thoughtfulness.

Take another small matter. Close by the rest billets of the battalion was a largish town. It boasted an officers' club, where one could play the entralling games of ping-pong and French billiards. It also boasted of tea-shops, and—other pleasures too numerous to enlarge upon. In normal times Bunny would have regarded it as the supreme essence of boredom, beside which even Murchester shone dazzlingly; but ideas vary according to one's doings, and after the trenches that town appealed as a place of riotous revelry. So one afternoon he made arrangements to visit it with a pal, and approached his Company Commander for leave. . . .

"Of course, my dear fellow, go by all means." His Major looked up from the paper he was reading. Then he suddenly remembered a little fact which had escaped Bunny's attention. "By the way, isn't No. 12 platoon playing No. 10 at football to-day?" No. 12 was Bunny's platoon.

"Yes, sir; but I'm not playing myself," said Bunny.

"That doesn't matter a damn," answered the other. "Your job is to be there and cheer 'em on. It's *your* platoon, boy. Do you get me? If it was anything vitally important I wouldn't say a word, but I take it you're going to the square to drink beer—what! and then have tea?"

Bunny admitted the soft impeachment.

"Then you stop behind, Smith, and go to-morrow." The Major looked at him kindly. "It's just as much

your job to do a thing like that as it is to turn up on parade, as it was to go to the bank before the war. You see what I mean?"

And Bunny saw what he meant. Gradually he began to realise, with the help of other little examples of a similar kind, what a regimental officer's job is; what a regimental officer must be if he would make good. The real meaning of the words, "*his men*," came home to him; the real joy of inspiring those men with love for him by his own kindly thought for them. He got to know them personally, their troubles and worries, their characters and failings. He began to realise the wonderful joy of having thirty or forty men looking to him for advice and assistance, treating him as a personal friend as well as an officer. He got most frightfully keen on his platoon's efficiency; he wanted it to be the best platoon in the best company in the best battalion in the Army. And he set to work to try and get the same spirit into his men. . . .

It was at a certain battalion exercise one morning that he learned perhaps the biggest lesson of any, and made the biggest stride forward towards his goal. At the time he almost wept, so great was his mortification and shame; but such is often the way. It is immaterial what actually occurred, but Bunny got his platoon tied up in the most hopeless confusion. Then he got flustered and swore, which made matters worse. Then he became aware that the entire battalion was watching his efforts, which made matters worse still. Finally, the Colonel suddenly appeared on the scene to find out what the trouble was.

He saw a jumbled mass of men, and he also saw the Company Commander. Then he let drive.

"Damn it, Major Fortescue!" he barked; "your company is drilling very badly. What the devil is the matter? You're keeping us all back."

Bunny heard his Major's answer: "I am sorry, sir; I will put it right."

Not a word of blame for his subordinate; the responsibility was his. In half a minute the company was straightened out and the exercise proceeded. . . .

"What was the trouble this morning, Smith? Don't you know your drill?" The morning's work was over and Bunny was standing in front of his Company Commander. "A bad show; you let the company down. Moreover, you undermined your platoon's confidence in you. Nos. 9, 10, and 11 are now telling No. 12 what damned fools they looked on parade."

"By Jove! sir, I'm sorry," stammered Bunny. "It was jolly good of you not to blame me to the C.O."

For a moment the Major did not answer. He was thinking, not for the first time, of the difference between the ideas in which he had been steeped as long as he could remember, and the instinctive ideas of the boy before him. Blame somebody or something, even if it's only the office cat, as long as *you* get off.

"If anything went wrong with your platoon, Smith, and you blamed your sergeant to me and put the responsibility on him, you'd be on the mat. After I've had it out with you, you can go and pitch into him if you like, but as far as I'm concerned it's your show. This morning it was mine. No officer ever attempts

to excuse himself by sheltering behind a subordinate; that is an unwritten law of the service. Never forget it. And now, go and read up your drill, and see that this morning's effort doesn't occur again. To lead your men they must have confidence in you."

Which was a big stride in knowledge, and therefore a big stride towards his goal, only at the beginning I said biggest. That comes in this way:

SCENE: A barn, with No. 12 platoon assembled playing cards, writing, etc. Time, 8.30 p.m. that night.

Weather, vile. Distance from officers' mess a quarter of a mile. Enter Bunny with the sergeant.

Sergeant: 'Shun!

Bunny: Sit down. Are you all comfortable? (Long and embarrassing pause.) I say—er—you men, I—er—let you—er—down this morning. Dam' bad show. Er—my fault. (Pause.) Won't occur again. Very sorry. (Another pause.) And we are bally well the best platoon. Er—good night. (Exit with sergeant.)

Omnes: Good night, sir.

Private Snooks to next-door neighbour: Lumme, that ain't 'alf bad of the little perisher. Raining like 'ell, and 'e comes all the way down 'ere to say 'e's sorry for making a ruddy fool of 'issel.

And so *ad nauseam* could one continue telling of these incidents which sound so little and mean so much in giving the regiment its soul; the soul without which it is dead and useless. That feeling which every officer

must have, of caring for his men, of jealousy for their comfort and well-being, without which he cannot be a real leader, comes not at once to the civilian with an outlook utterly individual. He does not think; he does not realise his responsibility; he does not instinctively grasp the fact like a second nature that it is his job. It only comes with time and trouble.

But who shall say that when it has come that man is not a better man, is not nearer the heart of what matters than he was before?

And one thing is certain. Unless the team are brought to their test full to the bursting point with that true co-operation which only thoughtful leadership can produce, that team will fail. Unless they have been cheered in their boredom, helped in their troubles, looked after during their periods of training, they will not—they cannot—face the big crucial realities and succeed. Death is a big reality; killing is a big reality, and the team must face both. Only the unselfish instinct to play the game for the side can pull it through; only ceaseless leadership in its true sense can inculcate that instinct. Wherein lies the glory and tragedy of war; all must learn the lesson, not all will remain to teach it. . . .

IV

In the year of grace 1916, in the month of July, Captain John Smith, still known to his intimates by the more homely title of Bunny, stood in a trench in front of his commanding officer. For three weeks the

battle of the Somme had raged, and the Royal Rutlands were back for the second time. Overhead the shells droned on their way, while great clouds of black and yellow fumes belched ceaselessly from the torn upland around where the crumps exploded. Above the trench shrapnel was bursting with its vicious crack, and a swarm of aeroplanes buzzed backwards and forwards in the sky. Occasionally the rattle of a machine-gun mingled with the orchestra, but for the most part the infantry was silent—waiting. In half an hour they were going over the top.

“Have you studied the ground, Bunny?” His old Company Commander, now his C.O., lit a cigarette and took out his map.

“I have, sir.” Bunny took off his tin hat and mopped his forehead. “My hat! ain’t it hot?”

“That small knoll comes right in the middle of your company’s last objective. You must hold that knoll, Bunny, at all costs.”

With a slight tightening of his jaw Bunny looked over the parapet, and fixed his eyes on the little knoll in question. Such a harmless little mound of earth; such an insignificant little bit of dirt, but it commanded the whole objective of their brigade. And so it must be held at all costs.

At last he spoke quite briefly. “It shall be held, sir.” Then, as if from an afterthought, “At all costs.”

The Colonel nodded. “Good luck, old boy. So long.” He passed out of sight down the trench, squeezing between the waiting men. Bunny heard him speaking to them as he went, a word here and there,

kindly pat on the back, a friend and a leader amongst his men.

"The Rutlands in the post of honour again, boys. Never failed yet, and there's no damn chance of our beginning now. Boches—beat to a frazzle. . . . Keep at it, lads—and go steady. . . ." His voice died away as he rounded a traverse, and Bunny sat down thoughtfully on the remnants of a fire-step.

"At all costs." He recalled the order he had once heard one of the finest colonels of one of the finest regiments in the world give to a company officer, many months before :

"Tell your men, my dear old Pumpkin, to get into that trench, to stay there, and if necessary to die there." The order had been obeyed to the letter.

There were twenty minutes to go before the barrage started creeping over the ground in front of them, and during those twenty minutes Bunny did some hard thinking. He felt quite cool; his whole mental attitude was merely intensely introspective. Somehow he knew deep down in his mind that it was the end, but it had no effect upon him. For the time being he was a detached spirit viewing things from an unbiassed standpoint.

With a feeling of cynical amusement he recalled that spring morning in Murchester when his uniform was seen in all its glory for the first time. Matilda, his eldest sister, neglected her household duties in order that she might admire and revere it from all conceivable vantage points; the twins—aged nine—paused in their matutinal consumption of toffee to poke

it with sticky fingers; even Claribel, the charwoman's daughter, coming down the stairs with a bucket of soapy water, stopped abruptly and remarked with conviction: "Lumme! ain't 'e a bit of orl rite?" Which it must be conceded was high praise from Claribel.

Outwardly, Bunny was not unduly excited. Before coming downstairs he had by means of a series of back-breaking manœuvres carried out with his sister's hand-glass and his own mirror, satisfied himself that the crease in the back, which he had noticed at the last fitting, had disappeared. He therefore felt perfectly qualified to be inspected by the female members of his family; in fact, he rather liked it. Claribel's honest words had brought a thrill to his heart, which he would never have believed possible.

"It's beautiful, Bunny, simply beautiful." Matilda at length found her tongue.

"I think it fits all right, doesn't it?" returned Bunny with suitable nonchalance. "Perhaps the coat might have been an inch longer; a little more in at the waist." He paused to let this great utterance take effect. "However, I think I'll just stroll down the town. I might even look up old Johnson."

Except for the fact that he inadvertently put on his old cloth cap instead of his new khaki hat his exit left nothing to be desired; and when the mistake had been rectified, and the front door finally slammed behind him, Bunny was quite good to look upon as he strolled down the High Street of Murchester to look up old Johnson.

The latter was old by comparison only, perhaps

forty, perhaps fifty, with an ailing wife and three small children. With his hair sadly thinned on the top of his head, his shoulders bowed with a slight stoop, and his lifeless tired eyes, he had always seemed to Bunny and the other clerks the typical old man. As to his exact age they had never troubled to think; anyway, to twenty, fifty seems a bit remote. They had accepted him as part of the bank, as part of the furniture along with the ledgers and the desk. . . .

If ever they realised that he seemed tired—God knows how tired—it never struck them that it concerned them in any way personally. Once Bunny had remarked to a pal sitting next him that the old boy looked more like a walking nightmare than usual. A customer was talking to him, and the customer was not pleased with a mistake in his account.

"I am very sorry, sir," murmured old Johnson. "I hope it has caused you no inconvenience. A stupid error on my part." !

The customer had left muttering, and the cashier came towards Bunny.

"You made a mistake, Smith, in this pass-book. Try to be more careful in future. It's almost impossible for me to keep an eye on everything."

That was all. No recrimination; no cursing—just a request.

"His wife is ill again," whispered his pal to Bunny, "and there's a fourth squeaker on the way. Good Lord! there ought to be a law passed against fellows like him on his income having four brats."

Bunny had agreed; and the little fact that the

cashier had accepted the blame, had not tried to excuse himself to the customer by throwing the onus on "one of the clerks," somehow escaped his notice. Doubtless it was a very little fact; now it struck him as it had not done them.

Bunny had turned through the well-remembered swing-doors with the faintest suspicion of a swagger.

"Good morning, Mr. Johnson." He leaned over the counter and spoke to the cashier. "How's the bank?"

"Why, Smith, I'm delighted to see you." Old Johnson's tired eyes showed real pleasure. "I must congratulate you on your commission, though I expect you were sorry to leave your old regiment."

"I was, in a way, but they wanted officers, and the Colonel offered me a commission if I'd care to have one, so here I am." Bunny's eyes wandered round the familiar room till they came to his own desk. A girl was sitting there, entering things up in *his* ledger. For a moment he frowned; a girl, a damned woman doing a man's work. Then he realised Mr. Johnson was speaking again.

"Looks different now, doesn't it, the old place with girls instead of men. Baxter and Tomkins are the only two of the old lot left, and they couldn't pass the doctor."

Bunny leant forward, and his voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "D'you find these women are a success? Are they as reliable as we used to be?"

A slight inscrutable smile flashed over the cashier's face. "Once they get into it they are just as reliable. I very rarely find any mistake in a pass-book nowa-

days." It might have been a sudden glint of sun that caused the heightened colour on Bunny's face—perhaps. "Yes, the girls have been splendid."

He turned to an excitable lady who had just come in, and soothed her gently.

"This item, madam, to which you allude is four shillings and twopence for a new cheque-book of fifty cheques. Each cheque costs a penny, which we charge you in your account. No; I don't think it would be quite fair for the bank to pay for customers' cheques. Good morning, madam, good morning."

His eyes met Bunny's over the counter, and there was something fierce in them. "That, Smith, is my life. For thirty years I've been doing that. I shall continue doing it until the end. The end—" He repeated the two words as if they were something sacred. "My God! boy, I don't know if you ever pray, but if you do, go down on your knees and thank God that to you has come deliverance from a servitude that is sometimes worse than death. If only I had been twenty years younger to-day, if only. . . . Good morning, Mr. Giles. Great weather, isn't it?"

The mask was back in place; old Johnson, courteous, tired old Johnson was talking affably with the farmer who had just come breezily in. And Bunny, with an odd sensation that he had gazed into a man's naked soul, had stepped out into the sunny, sleepy street.

It came back to him now, that moment, with a meaning totally new. "To you has come deliverance from a servitude that is sometimes worse than death. . . ."

Bunny got up restlessly and looked once again over the parapet to where, in the distance, a small knoll stood up in the sunlight. Nothing moved, no human being stirred, but when the time came it must be held "at all costs." And yet he knew that he *had* found that deliverance. . . . He had found the things that were worth while; he had found his manhood.

He sat down again and glanced at his watch.

"How much longer, sir?" The voice of a sergeant in his ear made him look up, and he grinned at the old and trusted friend beside him.

"Twelve minutes fifteen and a half seconds, Fraser," he answered cheerily. "Just nice time for a smoke."

He offered his case to the sergeant and lit a cigarette himself.

"It's a rum life, ain't it, sir?" said the N.C.O. after a short silence. "Going out there, prancing over the bally mud, and wondering if the old Hun likes it any more than we do."

"You're right, Fraser; it's a dam' rum life." Bunny thoughtfully stared in front of him. "A dam' rum life." He repeated the phrase half under his breath.

Not for the first time did the incongruity of the whole performance come home to him. He saw himself as he had come to the battalion a year before, utterly ignorant, utterly useless. He traced his gradual development during that year to what he was now, an officer, reliable and self-reliant, confident in himself and inspiring confidence in his men. He was very sure of himself; he knew he inspired confidence

in them; he knew they would follow him wherever he might lead them.

So many of the different elements of civilian life in England had come together under him, and he had watched their development, had tended their growth, had seen them fuse together in one steady compact whole, and then war had tested them, and they had not failed. Now was coming another of war's tests, and in his heart he knew it would be the supreme one for him and those he led.

Almost bitterly he asked himself the old, old question: "*Cui bono?*" Had his loved platoon been welded together only for this: the little mound—those fateful words: "At all costs?" Surely the sentiments of unselfishness, of playing the game, which these men had learned; surely the cheeriness, the tails-up "good heart" outlook on life which he had preached and practised and instilled into them could have been better utilised than keeping a damned mound "at all costs"? It seemed such utter waste of wonderful material, such ruin of new-planted but thriving grain. . . .

Two boots sticking out of the earth on top of the trench in front of him caught his eyes and held them. Involuntarily he shivered; those boots seemed to possess such a dreadful finality. There was a hole in one of the soles; he wondered if the man had noticed it before such trifles ceased to worry him; he wondered if their late owner had solved the *Cui bono* satisfactorily. . . .

Then he stopped wondering with a mental jerk and shook himself.

This was no time for philosophy; it was the time for action. For this moment had he trained and sweated his men; for this moment had he looked after them, and cared for them, and watched over their comfort. The *why* period belonged to the Bunny Smith of a year ago. He forced himself to see the answer, the assured, calm reply to the waverer's doubtful "What's the use?" The sinking of self in the community is only the logical outcome of the sinking of self in the individual; merely does it affect larger issues. And what is a company where divisions are concerned? What is a division where armies are in the scales? The only thing that matters is the side; as long as that is not let down in the great game nothing else counts.

To the subaltern, his platoon; to the C.O., his battalion; to the General, his division—each in his own sphere straining forward to the boundaries of his own horizon, be they great or small, each according to the measure of his responsibility playing for the side, playing for the Empire. Thus did the glimmerings of a great Imperialism come to an erstwhile bank clerk, glimmerings tinged with wonder at the size of the forces involved—the magnitude of an horizon so immeasurably beyond his own. And with the realisation came the certainty that whatever happened his efforts had not been wasted. He would have pulled his weight in the big game; in his small sphere he would have fulfilled his object, and no man may do more.

The mound must be held at all costs; that was his

task, that was his reward. A great pride swept through him; even so should it be.

With a friendly nod towards the two motionless boots, with a half-uttered greeting, "So long, old man; we're only just the pawns in the game, but it's a big thing even to be that," Bunny got over the top. The time for dreaming was past. Only a mound, a dirty little lump of mud, filled his thoughts.

• • • •

Thus ended the education of Bunny Smith, captain and sometimes bank clerk. You may perhaps have seen it in the paper, if not I will supply the deficiency. It ran as follows:

"Captain John Smith, late Royal Rutlands, for very conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. In the course of an attack this officer was ordered to hold a certain advanced position at all costs. He successfully resisted four separate counter-attacks by the enemy, to whom the position was of great tactical value, and then, running short of ammunition, although already wounded twice, rather than disobey his orders he charged the enemy who were massing for a fifth counter-attack with the remnants of his company, thereby disorganising them so much that the attack did not materialise. When found later by a reconnoitring patrol, this very gallant officer was surrounded by enemy dead."

Thus the *official* account, which came under the heading of eight new V.C.'s. *Unofficially*, can you

see the mound; can you hear the scream of the shells and the rattle of the machine-guns? Do you get Bunny, and the remnants of his men gathered round him; do you see him giving them the last "tails-up" buck; can you hear his final shout, "The Royal Rutlands will charge"? Can you picture them going into the Hun and the mix-up there was, as fighting, cursing, stabbing like fiends, Bunny's company held the mound at all costs? Can you picture it, I say, for God knows it was a grand sight? And thus did one of the Bunny Smiths play the game for the side, and at the cost of his life justify his inclusion in the team.

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In the year of grace 19—many John Smiths, known perhaps to their intimates as Bunny, will stand at the threshold of a new life, the life after the war. They, too, will have learned the lessons of playing for the side, and the responsibility of leadership; their test will come then, not on a mound held "at all costs." And it may be that it will prove the harder of the two; there will be less glory. . . .

They will be faced with a situation which is bound to be acute, and only their loyal co-operation will enable the men at the helm to steer the ship to safety. The side will be the same, the great side of Empire, only the setting of the fight will be different. But unless each Bunny Smith pulls his weight and brings to his civilian life the lessons he has learned in the

great game over the water, the lessons of true leadership and unselfishness, it may be that the snarling vapourings of an ignorant few will precipitate a bitter class war more dreadful and terrible than anything in France.

Just at present it would seem as if a wave of strange formulæ had flooded the world; dreamers arise, each with his own particular recipe for universal happiness. Each sect gathers to itself its own little band of followers, and having taken possession of the highest dunghill it can find proceeds to try and outcrow its neighbours. And all of them turn, sooner or later, on the subject of wealth—on the fact that one man has more money, or land, or possessions than another.

It is certainly not the writer's intention to discuss these truly wonderful doctrines. In every community equality is an impossibility, and has always been found an impossibility. Equality of wealth to-day would merely be a throw-back to a primeval state, and as impossible to maintain now as it was then. Were it not so the community would atrophy and die, since without inequality of material possessions there can be no incentive for material work. The sole value of money is buying work, nothing more, nothing less, though frequently gold is looked upon as possessing an intrinsic value of its own. But you cannot eat gold, you cannot drink gold; possessing nothing but gold assuredly you die.

Happiness is not attainable that way. A man's happiness lies in what he is, not in what he has, and the

fact should never be forgotten. It is Utopian, of course, an ideal impossible of fruition, that disregarding of material possessions. . . .

And yet, if there is anything in the great conception of the Kingdom of God on earth, what other state of society can then be in existence? Each individual unfettered by sordid worry over material issues, free to develop his own personality to the maximum; each soul free to open and expand a little nearer to perfection. And thus will the world cease to see through a glass darkly. . . .

But now such ideas are vain; all that one may do is to peer into the choking mists of rancour and strife, and pray that the orange glow of hope, which flickers sometimes from the depths for the eyes of faith to see, may not be clouded more impenetrably by our stupidity.

The Kingdom of God, the brotherhood of nations, is far away from us to-day. And yet, perhaps, not so far. Already have we an Empire, a free Empire, a commonwealth, comprising a third of the globe joined together by the silken bands of a wonderful sentiment, which are more powerful than any steel fetters of servitude. Voluntarily, willingly, has that great Empire come forward to fight the menace to freedom, the power that would have put for ever into the pit that orange glow of hope. That Empire realises the difference between our leadership and German autocracy; they realise that we develop where the German makes slaves; that we encourage and help their aspirations where the German crushes them; that

we make individuals, where the Germans make automatons. And our Empire knows and is content. . . .

But never let it be forgotten that, as in the regiment, the ideals are its traditions, its colours; so, in our Empire, the great central ideal is His Majesty the King and the sentiment attaching to his person. Should—which God forbid—anything happen to lower the prestige of that sentiment; should any utterly foolish and inconsequent persons succeed by word or deed in lowering the morale which the Empire possesses, and which is induced and kept inviolate by the leadership of the King, that *real* leadership, only in a far vaster sense, that is possessed by the good regimental officer, then there will be a danger, and a very real danger, of this great commonwealth of ours disrupting and throwing once again into the infinitely remote future the glorious dream of all mankind—the kingdom of all the nations in harmony.

And to come down from dreams to mundane details. There is no short cut to happiness, only by slow and painful steps shall we reach our goal. It is the men who have found their manhood in the game of life and death who must see that those steps do not falter and turn back; it is the men who have suffered and endured for freedom's sake who will have the right to see that their sacrifice is not in vain.

They know that unless everyone pulls together the side will suffer; they know that one clique or section cannot better itself *at the expense of another* without the welfare of the whole being retarded. Moreover—and this is perhaps the greatest step forward of all

due to the war—the old ideas of the classes and the masses have gone for ever from the men who have fought. The working man has fought by the side of the “sahib”; the working man has been led by the sahib, and in the process he has found out that his old ideas were wrong. He has suddenly realised that it is not birth which stands between him and a fuller freedom; in fact, it has come home to him with a force which surprised him that, for all his boasted pre-war freedom, combination under a real leader can be in very truth freer than individualism. And he has formed his own ideas as to the qualifications necessary for real leadership.

He has at last grasped the fact that between the slavery of the profiteer—who is the real enemy of all progress—and the leadership he has found in this war there is nothing in common. A man on one occasion said to me: “If all business at home was run on the same lines as a good regiment there would be no need for any trades unions.” And he was right. Trade unionism is the weapon—the only weapon—of the masses against the masters; it is an anachronism when used as a combination of a free community against its leader.

We cannot abolish trades unions: that is utterly out of the question. But if we are to reap the full benefit of this war, there must come a gradual diminution of their necessity. It must become an unthinkable thing that the workers of the country have to band together and use force to obtain from their employers fair and just treatment; it must become equally un-

thinkable that they should exceed the bounds of fairness in their demands. True co-operation must be used in every business concern; a financial and material co-operation actuated by the vital mainsprings of human sympathy and understanding.

And surely if that great band who have learned the lesson of playing for the side in the playground of Death, will not forget it when the scene is shifted to the battlefield of life, we shall have advanced a step nearer to the wonderful vision of the future. Out of this war we have got a knowledge of the other man which was utterly lacking before. Australians, Canadians, South Africans, are they not all Britishers, with Britain's ideals of freedom, and Britain's ideals of playing the game? There is room in all parts of our great Empire for men who are men, to work out their lives and find the happiness which comes from doing, not having. There must be no recurrence of the pre-war conditions of more men than jobs in England and more jobs than men in the Colonies. And when by real co-operation we have dissipated the fog of mistrust and class hatred in our own lands, when everyone in that far-flung Empire is pulling together for the good of the whole, then, and not till then, shall we have our Empire consolidated. It will be time enough then to look round and begin to consider the final and stupendous dream of world nationalisation—the Kingdom of God on earth.

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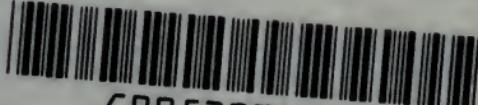
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